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THE

FLYING ROLL:

OR

FREE GRACE DISPLAYED.

BY

F. W. KRUMMACHER, D.D.

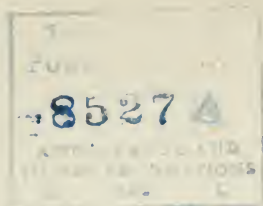
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THE
FLYING ROLL.

ZECH. v. 1—4.

Then I turned, and lift up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a flying roll. And he said unto me, What seest thou? And I answered, I see a flying roll; the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits. Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth shall be cut off as on this side according to it; and every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side, according to it. I will bring it forth, saith the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name: and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it, with the timber thereof, and the stones thereof.

THE voice of Zechariah resounds from the ruins of Jerusalem. He prophesied at the period when Israel, scarcely returned from Babylonish captivity, was occupied with the rebuilding of the desolated city and the ruined temple. The strength of the people was broken as it had never been before, and a melancholy feeling pervaded every breast, notwithstanding their regained liberty. But the Lord did not forget his son Judah, and sent him, amongst

other messengers of peace, the golden-mouthed Zechariah, who almost exclusively prophesied good; and, like a true evangelist, poured streams of refreshment and consolation into the wearied soul. What cheering prospects are unfolded, in the four first chapters of his prophecy, to the anxious minds of the people, through the obscurity in which they were at that time involved; and the glad tidings begin again in the sixth. The fifth chapter alone intervenes in a somewhat different tone, conveying a warning against the subtlety and envy of the devil, who would not cease endeavouring to establish his dominion along with the kingdom of the Lord.

This chapter contains two significant visions of a false human doctrine, which would oppose itself to the truth at all times; but, at certain periods, with very particular energy and decision. These visions had a primary reference to Jewish pharisaism, and afterwards to that of later times amongst Christians. But the prophet's sphere of vision extends still further; and, I am of opinion, he saw at that time, in spirit, that which has found its complete realization only in the anti-Christian and fashionable religion of the present day.

"Then I turned," says Zechariah, "and lift up mine eyes, and looked." The glorious vision of the golden candlestick and the two olive-trees had just passed before him, and a heart-cheering inter-

pretation had been given him of them by the mouth of the Lord himself. Gladly would he have gazed a while longer on these pleasing images; but this could not be permitted him. And thus occasionally we meet with those who have received a Divine permission to continue in happy ignorance of the dark side of the times in which they live, and who peacefully and permanently repose between the more pleasing visions of Bethlehem, Tabor, Calvary, and the heavenly Zion. Living almost entirely within, and scarcely affected by the outward world, they travel, quite like strangers and pilgrims, calmly and thoughtfully, along their retired path; and if compelled to hear, as they proceed upon their way, of the existing state of things in some particular place upon the earth, they hear it only as if they heard it not. They are constrained immediately to turn their ears again to the lips of Jesus, and inquire how it stands with themselves and their own hearts. Their heart is their world and their church; and that which they experience in intercourse with Jesus, their chronicle, their history of the day, and of the world.

But such happiness falls not to the lot of all in the kingdom of Christ. It is not permitted every one thus to shut himself up with the Lord, and to lead only a closet life. Others must enter with all their energies into the outward affairs of the church. Its position and promotion in their more universal

and extensive sense, is laid in an obligatory manner upon their hearts. They do not continue so untouched by the tumult and the various phenomena on the wide stage of the world, and are compelled to take a lively notice even of the operations of the kingdom of darkness. They must fight their way, by faith, through the shadowy images of their day; must weep and mourn over the dilapidation of their beloved Zion; supplicatingly call forth the arm of the Lord from the clouds against its destroyers; oppose the armed breast to the dangers which menace the city of God; draw the attention of others to them, and warn them against them.

One of this latter description, and thus situated, was the prophet Zechariah. Scarcely had he blissfully immersed himself in the contemplation of the golden candlestick, and refreshed himself with the heart-cheering assurance which was at the same time given him, for his own person also, than he receives a fresh instruction to lift up his eyes; and another vision, incomparably less pleasing, passes before his intellectual sight.

He sees a roll or letter—not such an epistle as those which were addressed to the Romans, Corinthians, and Hebrews; but an epistle dictated by the father of lies, addressed to the world, swelling with blasphemy, and carried from place to place by the rabble that reign in the air. The word, in the original, signifies a parchment roll or book; and

because books are the characteristics of the learned, it is implied, that the thing which Zechariah beheld contained an abundance of art, wit, wisdom, and doctrine.

What the prophet saw in the spirit, we, my dear brethren, behold this day in reality. The roll signifies nothing else than the erroneous and anti-Christian doctrine of our lapsed age. Or know you not that a doctrine is current in the world which bears the sword against the word of the Almighty, denying where the Scripture affirms, deifying reason as the only source of truth, and accusing the Lord's Christ of having, with Jesuitical prudence, accommodated himself to the erroneous ideas of his age?—a doctrine which brands the Apostles and Prophets with the mark of a superstitious fanaticism; which proclaims a god of whom the Bible is ignorant; recommends a virtue which in the Scriptures is termed a filthy and a spotted robe; and points out a way to heaven which renders useless the Mediator and his blood? Know ye not this doctrine of the moderns? Has it never met you on your path? It is it to which the vision of our prophet refers. This self-sufficient negating system, this mystery of modern illumination, is the roll which Zechariah beheld fluttering through the air. Certainly there was no need of a new doctrine to bring up this anti-Christian trash; seeing that unbelief, disgust at the word of

God, and proud self-conceited knowledge of what is good and evil, is the innate natural religion of every one. As soon as we see the light of this world, we already bear in our bosoms, as a mournful legacy from Adam, this flying roll, although it be still folded up and sealed. But in modern times, this darkness of the natural mind has been pronounced to be pure and holy; the innate deceitfulness of the human heart has been regularly spun out into a system of doctrine; the title and authority of true wisdom surreptitiously obtained for it; and it is offered for sale under this name in a thousand book-marts.

The roll which Zechariah saw was in the act of flying. It proceeds with a rapid motion through the air, as though it had wings like a bird. What this "flying" of the roll points out, is of itself sufficiently clear. "That specious fruit, human doctrine," says Luther, "is a book that is not willing to lie under the seat or on the shelf, but seeks to appear amongst the people, and to be preached and listened to in a much greater degree than the word of God; and hence it could not be designated more appropriately than as a flying book or roll, since there are so many preachers and scholars who propagate it. And if they were not permitted to prate and chatter about it, they would burst with the greatness of their art and science; so hot and eager are they to teach."

Blessed be God, that other book also, of which the evangelist John prophesies, has of late years received a fresh impetus, and burst its fetters. This book also flies, as with the pinions of a young eagle, mightily along, over hill and dale, greeting even the sons of the desert with its joyful tidings, and leaving behind it traces of a vigorous life upon the vast field of death. But the more joyfully the precious book of life wings its way to every land, so much the more rapidly also does the lying code move its wings. It follows the former like a ravening and devouring vulture, and the conflict between the two becomes every day more wild and furious. Oh that I could say that the Divine word prevailed over the lying roll in subjugating the human heart ! But a hundred houses and hearts are sooner open to the latter, than a single one to the former. And where is the wonder ? The lying epistle costs no postage. The paragraph of the renunciation of the world and self is wanting in its system of morals. It calls the command to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, a gloomy fancy. Its gate to heaven grants to every camel a convenient passage ; and when called upon to state the terms, the merest trifle is a price sufficient at which to knock down salvation and eternal life.

This lying roll, my brethren, is also amongst us. Formerly people were not so much on their guard against it, and let it in at the back door. Now,

however, they are no longer ashamed of it; nor will it be long before it will be openly exposed to view amongst us. Let them do so; we shall then at length be able to ascertain who really belong to us.

But although the roll settles itself occasionally, it still continues a flying roll. The doctrines of men are uncertain and evanescent. There is no reality in them; they afford neither strength nor peace of mind. If distress comes upon the individual, it takes wing, leaving the poor mortal in the lurch who had trusted in it, with a "See thou to that." It is a deceiver and a juggler, that promises much and fulfils nothing, nor is able to keep its engagements. And yet it flies so high, and swells itself above measure, calling itself the daughter of heaven: and although it is miserably put to shame at every sick and dying-bed, yet this morality-crier does not cease to sound a trumpet before her upon the highway, and in the market-places. How very different is the conduct of the eternal word! It goes about in the form of a servant, and causes no great noise and alarm; but manifests itself in power, performs more than it promises, always continues faithful, has never deceived any one, nor been obliged to confess in any extremity that it knows not what advice to give.

The flying roll is twenty cubits long and ten cubits broad, therefore of considerable extent. The

doctrines of men are numerous and copious, an extensive piece-work. Duties upon duties, and one trifling rule after another. The gospel, on the contrary, is compressed and simple, and reduces itself to one article—love to Jesus; for this is the fulfilling of the law.

But there is something else concealed in the measure of the roll. Twenty cubits long and ten cubits broad, was a sacred measure. Of these dimensions was the porch of Solomon, before the temple, which, though it joined up to the temple, was by no means the temple itself. Such is also the case with false doctrine. It has, if I may so speak, the measure of the sanctuary; it bears a resemblance to the faith in many respects; it has retained, in some measure, the form of Christianity; and really resting itself, in its phraseology and language, on the temple of truth, it would gladly be regarded as the temple itself and as the true gospel. But, nevertheless, it still stands without, and is only a kind of porch, without a laver, or sprinkling of blood, or censer, or priesthood, or ark of the covenant: nor does God speak in it from between the cherubim.

False doctrine swells with lies and deceit, and goes about with a mask and painted face. On first meeting it we are led to say: "Twenty cubits long and ten cubits broad; that is the measure and the form of the sanctuary!" Horrible deception! If

we examine it a little more closely, we find that the thing is altogether differently intended; it is lie upon lie, in the form of truth—a masquerade, and game at hide and seek, from beginning to end. For only pull down the evangelical mask, look narrowly at the thing concealed behind, and what is the result of this Biblical mummery? Nearly the following chain of doctrine: ‘Man is by no means so corrupt as the Scriptures, in Oriental hyperboles, represent him. He is able to perform all that is good if he only will. He has no need of a regeneration by a wonder of Divine creative power; earnest resolutions and efforts are the steps in the ladder to perfection. He can do without an Intercessor or Mediator. Let him be his own intercessor. Jesus Christ is the most admirable teacher of morals the world ever saw. He is the Son of God, highly exalted above all mankind, if not in essence, yet still according to the degree of perfection; the most perfect idea of a man, of whom it might be said, that in him that which is Divine appeared personified. He certainly was not God himself; and the doctrine of the Trinity held by the Church is an absurdity. Man is saved and justified by his own doings: yet not by works alone, but by faith and works.’ Hear how evangelical! But what is intended by the expression, “by faith?” In the Scriptures it means a confiding acceptance of the sufficient sacrifice of Christ.

But here it means nothing more than that a man must be religious; he must regard it as a truth that there is a God, and that the soul is immortal. But why do we pause longer at these insipid things, which are already sufficiently notorious? It is enough to say that they form the naked and unshelled substance of modern and fashionable doctrine; and the pious phraseology in which they are conveyed, is only the tinsel and the varnish.

Hear what the Lord himself says of the contents of the roll: "Every thief and every perjured person are pronounced guiltless, according to this roll." Blessed be God, there is a roll which, in a legal manner, and with the Divine concurrence, pronounces the sinner guiltless, and righteous for the sake of another's righteousness, and on the ground of the superabundant compensation offered by an all-sufficient Surety. But the flying roll of which we speak, the mimic of the gospel roll, pronounces, without ceremony, the sinner guiltless *in* his transgressions, without any sufficient cause, in a presumptuous and blasphemous manner. Two sins are particularly mentioned—theft and perjury. They are brought forward here as the representatives of the whole radical corruption of the natural man. Theft and perjury are the most prominent features of the two fundamental corruptions of the human heart—self-seeking and enmity to God. The Lord, therefore, intends to say, that, accord-

ing to that erroneous doctrine, the self-sufficient and God-forgetful individual is pronounced innocent and righteous in his ungodly and selfish nature; and such is the case, my brethren. The flying roll declares regeneration to be a needless thing; therefore the poison of the serpent, which pervades our members, from Adam downwards, is at liberty to remain. The roll knows nothing of self-denial; but its maxim is, 'Charity begins at home.' It knows nothing of the giving up of self; but it gives that honour to self of which it robs God, and thus deifies man. It knows nothing of crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts; but gives abundance of scope to the flesh, within the limits of decorum. Homage to carnal propensities and vainglory need not be terrified at being brought before its tribunal; and a hundred other things, which run directly contrary to the walk and conversation which God requires, are declared by the roll, in order to favour the tender flesh and beloved self, to be either necessary evils, pardonable weaknesses, indifferent matters, allowable enjoyments, or even amiable and beautiful traits of character.

Now even as the roll pronounces "thieves," or the selfish principle, righteous, so also those who are perjured, the transgressors of the first table of the Law. It is considered as a matter of little importance by the roll, whether a person believes

in the God of the Bible, or in another god ; whether he cleaves to the Scriptures, or to some system of human philosophy ; whether an individual prays, or lets it alone. The roll does not know a syllable of that profound veneration for the name and presence of God required by the Scriptures, any more than of the necessity of an unconditional submission to the word of God and his ordinances. ‘ We all believe in one God,’ is its absurd motto ; and Jews, Turks, and Heathens are hastily jumbled together in a senseless, mawkish, and disgusting tolerance, and bound together in one bundle.

You are now acquainted with the roll and its contents. Let me still add a few words respecting the destruction which it brings along with it. The Lord calls this much admired roll *a curse*. “ This is a curse,” says he, “ that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth.” By which is meant, that nothing but anathemas cleave to the soles of the doctrine contained in the roll, and that it bars every door to the entrance of blessing. For, continues he, “ I will bring it forth, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that swear-eth falsely by my name, and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it, with the timber thereof, and the stones thereof.” These are dreadful words.

“ I will bring it forth,” saith the Lord. “ It shall be made manifest,” is his meaning—that it is

a false doctrine, a thief, and a lying roll. It now glitters and soars aloft, is crowned with glory and honour, and is called a system of light and truth; but I will strip it of its varnish, and expunge its false colouring, so that every one shall see its theory and its falsehood. A time shall arrive when the roll shall be trodden under foot, and execrated to the bottom of the ocean of oblivion. The garlands will then wither on the tombs of those who dictated it, and maledictions alone murmur around their solitary monuments.

“It shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name, and it shall remain in the midst of his house.” What a dreadful threatening denounced against the disciples of this lying doctrine! The doctrine shall remain with them! Horrible! He thereby drives a nail through the roll, and what is fastened by the Almighty remains firm, and cannot be loosened or detached by any instrument. Delusion shall continue “strong” in the soul, as the Scripture elsewhere expresses the “remaining” of the roll. Wo unto him to whom this menace is applicable! For such a one there is no longer any deliverance from the fatal roll. Falsehood is abiding in him, delusion permanent, repugnance to the Gospel indelible, and admission to his soul for ever debarred to the light of God. He dies in his delusion, and in this state he enters into eternity;

in this state he is judged—and bound with the fetters of his own lies, he sinks irrecoverably into hell.

The word, which in our version is translated “remain,” may be also rendered “to pass the night.” It will indeed be night about such a one—a night of tribulation, a night of death. The sun of his pleasure has set; the glimmering taper of his false peace is extinguished by the rising storm of conscience. Now, thou vaunting roll, show what thou canst do, and save thy disciple! True, it continues with the distressed mortal, but it is only to mock his misery, and to manifest the whole extent of its own nakedness, impotence, and worthlessness. Oh how has the poor wretch been deceived! How dreadfully has he been robbed and plundered by philosophy and vain deceit! Behold! his house, with the timber and the stones thereof, are consumed by the roll. He no longer feels any courage to pray, any consolation of grace, any confidence in a living God, any certain hope of eternal life. The unhappy wretch stands upon the ashes of his habitation, without shelter, staff, or couch, enveloped in the vapour of a sullen despondency and despair; and notwithstanding the depth of his distress, so firmly fixed in falsehood, and so beclouded by his delusions, that all idea of his ever directing his course to the peaceful haven of truth, is entirely at an end.

Do not, however, imagine that there is no rea-

son to apprehend such a strengthening and confirming in delusion on the part of a gracious God. Look at Israel, that degenerate race! What has been its fate during the last two thousand years? Israel likewise rejected the word of truth, and attached himself to the flying and lying roll of the Talmud. The roll has remained, even to this hour; and, alas! how has it consumed the house of Israel; together with the timber and the stones! Does not the whole nation resemble a city laid in ashes? How are they left—entirely in accordance with that ancient prediction (Hosea iii. 4)—“without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim.” Their sentence is dreadful, and they are daily carried off in the midst of their delusions. Ah, how firmly does the roll stick to them! but there it remains, in order to render it strikingly apparent to us, that “our God is a consuming fire, and an enemy to lies!”

You now know, my dear friends, the nature of Zechariah’s maledictory roll. Wherever this roll meets you, and under whatever form—whether masked or with open vizard, in a pious tone, or shamelessly blaspheming and ridiculing, in writing or in uttered words, in sermons, or in books and periodical papers—greet him with a bold “Who’s there?” and look him full in the face. If it be he—the anti-Christian vagrant—make short work with

him. Cast the roll away from you. Say, 'Thou hast mistaken thy man; we correspond not with hell;' and do not give it a night's lodging in your house; for danger is connected with its reception; scorpions sleep beneath its seal. And if any one of you has already made room for its admittance, give it this day notice to quit, lest the roll of false doctrine become master in your house, and lest the Almighty fasten it in his wrath, and give free scope to the destroyer. But look, here is another roll, written by the Spirit of truth, and addressed "to all who desire to be saved." Wherever this roll of the Gospel is received, it also "remains;" but in the character of an angel of God, beautifying and blessing. It consumes only *that* timber and *those* stones, which are of no use; and lays in their place another stone, which no fire can destroy, and points out to you a species of wood for the erection of a peaceful habitation, that is never injured by the tooth of time. To those who receive this roll, it presents nothing but salutations of affection from on high. And, lo! the Lord will also bring it forth in due time, and openly prove, in a glorious manner, that it was indeed a Divine roll, an epistle from above. Aye, and whoever hungers after righteousness, life, and peace—to him would I say, as the Lord once did to his prophet, "Eat the roll that is before thee."

This roll proclaims an unconditional amnesty to

the sinner, a speedy and eternal recovery to the sick, the most blissful liberty to the captive, and unfolds to him, who is driven about on the roaring ocean of the present life, the prospect of a landing-place, from whose peaceful shores no storm shall beat back his vessel any more. Oh! may this precious word of God be blessed to us! Let it remain your Magna Charta, my hearers! Cleave closely to its precepts, for they are your life; and inscribe on all the pillars of your church:—"Though any one should preach to us any other Gospel, than that which we have received, even were it an angel from heaven, let him be accursed!" Amen.

WHO IS HE THAT CONDEMNETH ?

DELIVERED ON EASTER-DAY.

“BEHOLD I will extend peace to her like a river.” Such is the Lord’s promise in Isaiah, lxvi. 12. Thousands of years have the ears of his saints stood upon the watch-tower, anxious to catch a sound of the noise of this stream. Thousands of years have his pilgrims panted after a draught from this river of peace ! Now at length it has broken forth, and, gushing from its triple source—from Bethlehem, from Golgotha, and from Joseph’s open tomb—rolls its saving waves along from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same.

Jerusalem, this city of God upon earth, is overflowed by this stream ; but we, beloved, appear to dwell upon an arid island ; at least, it seems as if this stream sent forth but small and shallow rivulets in the midst of us. Yea, how is it that on the whole there is found amongst us so little real peace and hearty joy, and a thousand times more complaining, sighing, doubting, and lamentation ?—and yet, here, too, is Jerusalem ! Is it that our external prosperity is too great, and that therefore in-

ternal chastisement and restraint is necessary? Is it that our Christianity lives, in external circumstances, too secure, tranquil, and prosperous, and that the want of an external cross must be compensated by internal storms and temptations? Yes, this is very possible; such a state of things is profitable for us. Or, is it that the river flows on in the midst of us, and we intrench ourselves and our hearts behind mounds of every sort, that it may not penetrate to us? Are we, perhaps, too cautious to draw water from this river, and of too little faith to regard the river as our own, and to open our hearts to its waters? Have we perhaps heard too often, that Christians must have a cross, and therefore choose to make a cross ourselves, and voluntarily hang down our heads like a bulrush? That would indeed be folly; and yet of such fools there is no scarcity.—Brethren, we celebrate a festival which commands us to dismiss every doubt, and to open all doors, that peace and joy may fill the house up to the top of its highest pinnacle. He who made this day for us, wills that on this His day of triumph we should rejoice in Him, and participate in His joy. Only look into the resurrection-history, and all must rejoice—none dare remain sorrowful. Jesus looks round to see who is there that sits weeping in a corner, and immediately stands before him, and knows not what else to say, than, “Why weepest thou? Weep not! Peace be with thee! My

peace I leave with you—my peace give I unto you !”

Oh, then, whosoever has never been glad, let him become so this day! The river of peace still murmurs along; may God guide it into our souls and fulfil to us the promise, “I will extend peace to Jerusalem like a river.” Concerning this peace we intend to speak in this last festal hour.

PRAYER.

Once more, O risen Prince of Peace! we approach full of adoration, to Thy open grave, and do homage before Thee, compassed with the glory of triumph. Once more we draw near to Thy forsaken resting-place, and with joy behold the fury of the bottomless pit, by Thee annihilated; the serpent with bruised head, and Death lying at Thy feet as a conquered adversary. O meet us, thou Living One, as thou wert wont to meet Thy people, and grant us, too, that we may rejoice on Thy day of joy. Teach us also in the light of Thy resurrection to sing Hallelujah. Oh, take away at length the oppression, the bondage from our souls, and out of our mouths ordain praise for Thyself. Thou art the Sun which makes us joyful! send forth, then, Thy warm rays into our cold hearts, and dwell, as Thou choosest to dwell, in the praise of Israel!

Are they not our enemies that Thou hast slain—our victories that Thou hast gained—our triumphs

that Thou hast won ? Was it not for us that Thou subduedst Death—for us, that Thou laidst Hell low in the dust—for us, that Thou broughtest life to light ? Are they not our garlands in which Thou shinest—our garments with which Thou art adorned—and is not all the glory with which Thou compassed Thyself our own ? Oh then, tell us this day that all is ours ; make us certain of it, that we may lift up our heads, and as Thy people, willing in the day of Thy power, may, after Thy victory, worship Thee in the beauty of holiness !

ROM. viii. 3.

“Who is he that condemneth ? It is Christ that died ; yea, rather, that is risen again ; who is even at the right hand of God ; who also maketh intercession for us.”

THESE words have sounds of mirth and life. They are the music of Easter, and the resurrection-tones of jubilee. Oh that, one and all, we might be able to conclude this festival with this shout of triumph !—Behold, the total amount of consolation, brought to us by Passion-week, Good Friday, and Easter, is expressed in these cheerful and cheering words. Let us then examine it a little more closely, and direct our attention to three points. We shall consider,

- I. The defying challenge ;
- II. Who may join in it ;
- III. Upon what it is founded.

I.

“Who is he that condemneth ?”—Hold ! who is it that calls out there ? We look round, and, behold, there stands before us a man with a cheerful countenance and uplifted head ; he stands there, firm as a battlement, his arm resting on his side, as if he would say, Now then, who dares take up my gauntlet ? His eyes sparkle ; victory is pictured in his features ; tranquil confidence in the expression of his countenance ; and serene defiance on his forehead. Who is he ? He is one from Judah—a Christian. How ! a Christian so full of daring ? O yes ; these people are lambs and lions at once ; like the Captain of their salvation, of whom it is said, “And as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth ;” and in another place, “The Lion hath roared, who will not be afraid ?” O yes ; Christians can be very daring, and very proud ; and well they may be ; for is not that pride when they throw your honour in your face, and say, “O world, thine honour I want not ?” and is that not daring, when they bind your reproach and shame around their head like a princely diadem, and parade therewith as with a crown ? Is not that pride, when in utter indifference they pass by your places of amusement, as those that are accustomed to something better than your empty pleasures ? and is that not daring, when in chains and bands, and midst storms of the fiercest persecution, they

can laugh and sing, to the mortification of the world and the devil, as Paul and Silas did in their prison ? Yes, Christians are free and courageous people, for the Lord is their boast and their pride. But if they look off from Him, and upon themselves ; aye, then their glory shrivels together, and there is an end of their daring and their proud carriage ; then the head hangs down as a bulrush ; the eyes are cast down, and the man becomes tame as a lamb, and dares not for shame and confusion to open his mouth.

But where have we left the man with the voice of defiance ? There he stands, and looks about with sparkling eyes, as if he had a feud with heaven and earth, and therefore cries so loud that the ears tingle : “ Who will condemn ? ” That sounds boldly. Who is the man that dares to boast thus ? According to his state of nature, a godless creature without fellow ; an enemy to Jesus Christ and his saints ; a persecutor and murderer of the churches, who with a malicious joy can make the blood of an innocent his pasture ; a proud, self-righteous disciple of the Pharisees, and a fearful instrument of Antichrist. There you have him as he was : and would you know what he is, hear it out of his own mouth : “ I, the chief of sinners—oh wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? I see a law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into

captivity to the law of sin. The good that I would, I do not ; but the evil which I would not, that I do. And, lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." Now you know him.

What, then, is the man about—what piece of fool-hardihood is he going to accomplish ? Oh, incomparable "daring ! Behold, there he goes. Whither then ? Yes ; ye shall be astonished. Behold, in the distance, that lofty mountain that rises up to heaven ; the whole mountain as a flame of fire ; the thick smoke around, and thunder and lightning compassing its head ; and hark ! the sound of the trumpet waxing louder and louder, so that the rocks quake ! And the Lord descends upon the Mount Sinai ; but upon its top is a fire, and the smoke thereof mounts up like the smoke from a furnace, so that the whole mountain quakes : and now give ear to the words : "I am a jealous God and a consuming fire !" and again, "Thou shalt, and thou shalt not ! Thou shalt, and thou shalt not !" and again, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the Law to do them : " "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book : " "Tribulation and anguish upon every soul that doeth evil." And again, "He that offendeth in one point is guilty of all." And

again, "A fire is kindled in mine anger and shall burn to the lowest hell: and all the people shall say, Amen." And, behold, there is a wide opening eye like a flame of fire above the mountain, that looks and watches that not a tittle of this eternal law fall to the ground; and a dreadful sword glitters like lightning beside it, against the transgressor; and the mountain itself is so holy that God forbids him even to touch it: "Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall surely be put to death." But, be it never so holy and so dreadful, yon man advances straight towards it; he touches it, he climbs up its height, he approaches the darkness, he looks without fear into the midst of the alarm, and cries, as if he would outery both thunder and trumpet, "Who is he that condemneth?" And the Eye of Flame consumes him not! and Moses accuses him not! All is dumb, as if a Deity had cried!—What mean these things?

He quits Mount Sinai, and goes; oh whither? Oh, presumption! He stands over the abyss of hell; oh, spectacle of horror!—a burning lake; a fire which is never extinguished; monsters who never die; a rattle of everlasting chains; howlings of the damned! Flee! A shudder comes over the frame—the hair stands on end: but he looks in, as into a phantasmagoria, or upon a painted picture, from which he has nothing to fear. Pre-

sumptuous man ! Behold, he walks amidst a thousand devils : their prince is the fallen Morning-star ; the old Serpent, Satan—a deceiver, and cunning without equal ; the accuser of men, who day and night watches their sins, that he may denounce them before God ;—a crafty fellow, who sees astonishingly far into the human heart ; who does not suffer any to dissemble to him ; whom the strictest external religion cannot deceive ; but who, as we see from the history of Job, is able to discover whether one serves God for nought, or for the sake of profit. A dreadful enemy ! who, that ought not to be afraid of him ? But our venturesome friend looks at him straight in the face ; stares boldly into the midst of the devil's hosts ; pulls open his maw, and cries down into the lowest abyss, so loud that the dismal vaults return a hundred echoes, “Who—who is he that condemneth ?” And, oh wonder ! The devils gnash their teeth and are dumb.

But now he advances into the habitations of the dead. Oh, behold whole hosts of accusers—of witnesses against him. Paul, Paul ! dost thou not quake into nothing at such a sight ? Behold : here is one whom thou hast murdered ; another thou castedst into chains and bonds : this one thou lockedst up in the night in a dungeon ; and that one thou laidst upon the rack, and delightedst thyself in the streams of his blood. Behold the testimony

against thee: they bear it on their body; their wounds, their mangled limbs, their stripes, their scars, call down curse and death upon thy head. Thy chivalry must now have an end. Oh, not yet! 'Come forth, who has any thing against me. Ye bloody corpses, which I gave over to death, arise! Who dares—who accuses me? Who is he that condemneth? who is he that condemneth?' Does no one venture? None: the ungodly has won the suit!

He looks round to see whether any may take courage to stand up against him; and behold, there announces himself the worst witness of all; one who cannot be bribed; straight-forward, penetrating, and unsparing; one who resides in his own breast, and is privy to every thing, even what takes place in the hidden chambers of thought and feeling: "Conscience" is his name. He brings forward a hundred thousand acts of guilt, and leaves not a hair that is innocent. He makes him—God alone knows, what a monster! There is no ignominy, and no abomination, which he does not heap upon his head; and he swears by the living God that his testimony is true. Now, Paul, reach hither thy back that it may receive the brand. Here the ceremony is at an end. Nay, by no means; seek some one else to terrify. 'Thou invisible phantom,' he cries out, 'we are nothing moved at thy thundering. Peace, invisible accuser! Stay at

home with thy accusations, thou subtle witness. I must confess thou speakest truth—and yet, who is he that condemneth ?’

And what happens next ? Ha ! what a sight ! The veil rolls up, the heavens flee ; the earth departs ; the mountains quake ; the hills melt ; and the world, with all that is therein, is one flame ; and, behold, there stands a throne prepared and decked with all the insignia of terror ; and One sits thereupon whose eyes are flames of fire, whose feet are brass, and righteousness his girdle and crown. We know him—and yet we know him not ; for he is no longer the boy of Bethlehem with the shepherd’s staff ; he is no longer the humble one, who has not where to lay his head ; he is no more the lamb that was dumb before its shearers. He bears the sceptre of infinite dominion ; the key of the Almighty, to open and shut heaven and hell at his pleasure ; and his wrath is horrible—a fiery furnace to consume the adversaries like straw. Whole hosts, thousand times thousands, are precipitated into the abyss of hell, are delivered over to the devils for ever—for ever—and there is no pity and no mercy ! There are amongst them the honourable, whose names glitter amongst the benefactors of nations—Away ! I know you not ! There are the glorious there, who have won battles, taken towns, made kingdoms happy—Away with the glorious ! I never knew them ! There are there

the religious, against whom no human being dares to testify; who endowed churches and schools; spent days in praying and singing; on whom one can hardly discover a speck, so cautious and careful were they—Away with these religious! I am displeased with their righteousness; away! into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels!—Oh, dreadful, horrible! the hard rocks might well crumble into dust and ashes in dismay. Behold, how the whole atmosphere is full of nothing but howling and gnashing of teeth; and the arrows of wrath fly by thousands, enough to obscure the light of heaven. And there a man rushes boldly and rapidly through all the din; presents himself at the bar of the tribunal; lifts up his head, and cries aloud, so that the whole court rings with the sound: “Who—who is he that condemneth?” Who ‘is the presumptuous one? who, that is guilty of such perilous adventure? Ha! we know him: he has already given a universal challenge; and now he goes to the utmost extreme: he places himself in the light of those eyes which search heart and reins, that they may try to find something against him. ‘Arise! who dares? who is he that condemneth,’ he cries, and there is no condemner! The devils curse, the damned cry out at the injustice: from hell the voices cry, ‘He was more ungodly than we.’ But what do they effect? This ungodly one passes through in peace, and is condemned of none.

II.

Ha ! what an excellent state is that, to know of ourselves that we are irreproachable and justified before God and the whole creation ; and, in the face of heaven and earth, of God and man, of angels and devil, to cry out assured : “ Who is he that condemneth ? ” and, behold, heaven and earth must be dumb !—But who is able to do so ? Thou, perhaps—and thou ? Now, then, make a trial and cry, “ Who is he that condemneth ? ” Behold ! instead of one, a thousand sentences of condemnation will rattle down upon thy head, and curses will overwhelm thee, as with a torrentuous shower. Thou art known, friend ; thy hurt is manifest ; thou dwellest among sleeping lions ; wo to thee when they awake ; they will devour and tear thee in pieces ! These lions are thy conscience—the Law—and the accuser in hell—the inmates of thine house—and others, too many to name. Only wait until the hearing of the witnesses, and they will all condemn thee. Ha ! the sins of thy youth alone would destroy thee, and though no one should condemn thee—we, who only know thee a little, are able to hurl thee down headlong, and by our testimony against thee to draw down the sentence of death upon thy head. Thou, therefore, be quiet, and rejoice that hell has not yet swallowed thee !

Well, then, who dare say, with Paul, “ Who is he that condemneth ? ” Answer. None but he

who can say, with Paul, "Christ is here."* This it is that qualifies. That is easily seen—is it not ? But, hold ; rejoice not too soon. All depends upon the little word "here," in what sense it is to be understood. You think, for example, that if one can only say "Christ is here"—in the head—that is enough. But if so, then, beloved brethren, all the devils might cry, "Who is he that condemneth ?" for in this sense, they too can say "Christ is here." I tell you that that Christ, who dwells nowhere else, you may take to hell with you. 'What ! take all those clear views, and all that lovely knowledge to hell ?' Yes, beloved brethren ; innumerable is the crowd who with mere head-knowledge wander on to hell.—'But how is it, then, if Christ be here ?' In the mouth, do you mean ? Why, if that were sufficient, the case would not be so hard ; we preachers should then have a peculiar advantage, and might dispense with repentance, regeneration, and all such bitter and hateful things ; but the Christ that is here, and nowhere else, will not intercede for us in our time of need.

When Paul says "Christ is here," he lays his

* Instead of the words, "It is Christ who died," Luther has, "Christ is *here* who died ;" thus inserting the word "here," for which there is no authority in the original. It is truly astonishing that Krummacher should build so much of his sermon upon a translation unwarranted by the Apostle's words.

hand upon his heart. Can you do that too ? If so, blessed are ye ! “Who is he that condemneth ?” only make a trial—the hand on the heart ! Now, then, I ask you before God, what is beneath ? Christ, or Belial, and the world ? Here the two parties divide. They who cannot say, “I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ;” they go to the left hand—they are cursed. The others shout with joy, “Who is he that condemneth ?” and may do so, for Christ is here !

But now you are desirous to know how we can ascertain whether Christ is here or not ? The answer is found in the words “a good tree brings forth its fruit in its season.” Hear these words, *Every fruit in its season*. One must not puzzle one’s-self, looking for all the fruits of the new man altogether, and at once : by so doing we unnecessarily destroy our peace. There are Christians who think, any hour that they set themselves down to seek for the signs of a state of grace in themselves, that they must find them, one and all—from number one on—together, and plainly marked. And because this is very seldom the case, they never attain to internal peace, and this is a misunderstanding. “Every fruit in its season ;” this is the rule according to which you must search. For example, when you stumble, then is the season for the fruit of repentance ; see, then, whether it is hanging on the tree. When the conscience rages,

then is the season when the fruit of longing after the blood of the Sacrifice must show itself: be careful, then, that it appear. When a child of God is in want, then must the sweet grapes of love redden into ripeness. When you are cast amongst the children of this world, then a certain sense of discomfort, a feeling of not being at home, a longing after our native land, is the fruit which ought to be found; according to the saying, "In the world ye shall have tribulation," &c. He, then, who observes that the tree of his inner man sends forth such heavenly fruits, each in its season, let him not be uneasy that they are not all, always, to be found; but rejoice, and say, to the honour of Christ, "Christ is here." It is true, that Christ may often retire so far into the depths of the soul, that scarce a trace of his existence there can be perceived: but if he be there once, he is there for ever. If a regenerate person should again become a natural man, another regeneration by God's almighty power would be necessary; but to think such a thing possible would be nonsense. But never did Christian fall so far, as that a time should not come for the leafless tree again to put forth its fruit, and when one could not say, "Christ is here." A storm often restores an apparently dead tree to all the lovely bloom of spring. And even should it last until death, in this state of decay and saplessness, when this general alarm is sounded, the old

soldiers will certainly place themselves in rank and order ; and, like young heroes, march joyfully to Jerusalem under the good old banner of the Lamb.

III.

Thus, then, he who can say "Christ is here," he may also say, "Who will condemn?" But upon what ground? That we learn from Paul. What does he look to when he calls out his daring words, "Who is he that condemneth?" To works? deeds? noble feelings, and such like? By no means. The ground upon which he stands is, first, a cross; and then the broken ruins of the grave. He cries, "Christ is here, who died; yea, rather, who is risen again." But with his right hand he points to a throne above him, and a priestly sanctuary, and says, "Who is he that condemneth? Christ is here, that died; yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Here you have the whole foundation upon which our guiltlessness and undamnableness rest; and truly the foundation is adamantine! We found our confidence therefore, first of all, upon the mountain of blood and the beams of the cross. As truly as my Lord died in this place, so certainly am I in this place free from condemnation! In this place all the accusations of men and devils appear to me in the highest degree ridiculous—all the reproaches of conscience

falsely applied ; all the menaces of the Law as mere scarecrows ; all curses as shots wide of the mark. Ask me, and here I will give you full information. ‘Dost thou feel no want there ?’ No, none whatever. ‘Art thou afraid of no sin ?’ No, of none. ‘Art thou not terrified when thy heart condemns thee ?’ God is for me, and he is greater than my heart. ‘If thou wert without sin, wouldest thou not be more assured than thou art now ?’ Not in the least : my assurance grows not in proportion to my sanctification ; it rests on the offering of Christ. ‘But if thou wert altogether holy, wouldest thou have less to fear than now ?’ I am altogether holy ; and less than nothing cannot be imagined, and I fear not at all. Have you any other question to propose ? Only ask : we love to be reminded of these things ; and shall be at no loss for an answer. ‘God is wroth against sin ; may he, then, not be wroth at thine ?’ He has been wroth ; this cross is witness—who hung thereon ? I in my Head, and drank down my curse. ‘But may not his wrath be kindled against thee anew ?’ I have experienced his wrath, in that measure in which I shall deserve it when the last sin shall have been committed—that is, the whole sum with which my life concludes, and I give up the ghost. Not one thought of wrath dare move against me, or God denies himself, and becomes unjust, inasmuch as he gives me more than he has threatened and I

have deserved. 'Can, therefore, no punishment overtake thee?' No punishment whatsoever—no judgment whatsoever—no condemnation whatsoever; in short, nothing hostile, for all has been paid off once for all upon the cross. And if ever I should go so far—which may God forbid!—that I, who have tasted of the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, should fall away, and crucify the Son of God afresh and put him to an open shame, and should become a field bringing forth thorns and briars and nigh unto cursing; still, notwithstanding all this, no fire could touch me, except such an one as the hand of Love kindles upon me, in order to renew me to repentance.* Hear ye! hear ye! such is my standing, that God can never more be displeased with me without being at strife with Himself, for the very extremity of his displeasure was poured out upon our bleeding Surety. Thus we have been taken away for ever from all judgment, and dispensed from all examinations, suits and inquisitions; and cry, hiding ourselves behind Him that was dead, "Who is he that condemneth?" and enter at once—however holy or wicked—immediately from our death-bed—without stay, let, or hindrance—into heaven, to take possession of our place; and no door-keeper dare presume to subject us to any examination; we

* The reader is requested to compare the above passage with Heb. vi. 4—8.

are marked on the forehead and the hand with a cross. That is our passport and credential, before which all the police of heaven must bow, and that of hell no less.

But let us not be mistaken, my brethren: our position upon Golgotha would still be very insecure, and we could cry only in a faint tone, "Who is he that condemneth?" if we did not perceive by the side of the cross that banner of victory which flutters over the open tomb of our Head; and if we could not, like Paul, after "Christ is here, who died," shout with joy, "yea, rather, who is risen again." If thou art in distress, and shouldst be distrained, and findest a friend to go security for thee, thou wouldst rejoice; but with trembling still, until thou knowest that thy creditor has accepted the security. In like manner, all depended upon this, that the sacrifice of our representative should be acknowledged, received, and approved of by God as valid and sufficient. But, behold how, as it were with drums and trumpets, God has proclaimed from heaven his consent and assent, and stamped upon the receipt which He has written for us, to acknowledge the payment of Jesus, the impress of a signet which can never be blotted out—namely, in the Resurrection from the dead of Him who paid. If, then, our hope in the sacrifice of Christ be vain and perverse, no one else—I say it with reverence and respect—is responsible, but God himself, who is the author of this hope.

If we regard the satisfaction as insufficient for our salvation, then God must have left our Surety in the grave, or taken him away secretly, or have intimated the same in some other way ; but could never have made an Easter-day for us, nor presented before our eyes the Surety crowned with such glory ; for from all this pomp and splendour no other conclusion can be drawn than this, that the Almighty is perfectly satisfied with the security given. If, then, he would condemn us, we should hold up to Him the stones of the rent rocky tomb, and say, " Lord, these stones testify that thou thyself hast encouraged us to cast ourselves altogether upon Jesus. Lord ! these stones are the seal which thou hast affixed to the documents of our atonement. Lord, these stones would cry out against injustice, if thou shouldst disappoint the hopes which thou thyself hast created in us, of thine own accord ;" and truly, even if God hesitated, yet when he looks upon these rocky fragments—by which He has solemnly promised us forgiveness in the wounds of Jesus—*necessity* would be laid upon Him to pronounce us righteous, in order to remain holy, true and faithful—that is, to remain God. Behold, such is the security of our affairs. " Who is he that condemneth ?"

Hear what Paul says : " If Christ be not risen, ye are yet in your sins:" but now, he means to say, not in your sins. 'How ! Paul means to say,

no more under the curse and wrath ? No ! no longer in your sins either. O mystery of godliness ! We are He who is risen. ‘Who ? we ?’ Yes, yes, we poor sinners ! Not a ray of light that is seen in Him, not a virtue which shines around Him, that is not ours. Behold how he stands there : a youthful champion upon his open tomb—such we stand before God. Not, such we *shall* stand ; but such we stand. He suffered ; we also ! He was taken away from judgment ; we with him ! Nothing damnable rests longer upon Him ; nothing damnable upon us either. He left all the sins which lay upon him, upon the cross : we also. He is a picture of purity and beauty ; we no less ! He is clothed with nothing but obedience and light ; the same light, the same obedience, adorns us also. He dares, clothed in pure linen, venture into the light of the Eternal Fire-eyes, without any fear lest the least grain of dust should be found upon him ; we venture too ! He is the righteousness of God himself ; we are also, for his righteousness is given to us. ‘But our old Adam ?’ He lies before God in the grave of an eternal oblivion. O ecstasy of joy ! We are not merely pardoned delinquents ; we are beloved and honoured saints of God ; and as from the cross, “Who is he that condemneth ?” so from the place of our Head’s exaltation we cry, “Which of you convinceth me of sin ?”

And what we cry to-day, the same will we cry

to-morrow, and the day after, and to the end. Supposing all that can be supposed—stumbling and defects, falling away and straying, new sins and new shame—out of every fall, out of every overthrow, we will venture to cry, “Who is he that condemneth?” Our Surety is not gone far over land; we see him every moment: and where? in what attitude? We see him, either as King upon the throne; or near the throne, as Advocate and Intercessor; and shout joyfully, “Christ is here, who not only died and rose again, but who sitteth at the right hand of God, and maketh intercession for us.” I see him sit upon the throne: what, then, have I to fear* from a Judge who is interested to the utmost in my salvation, and who allowed himself to be thrown overboard, rather than let me perish in the storm? My Friend and Brother will not condemn me. I set myself boldly beside him upon his resting-place, and draw near to him, for we are acquainted: he is my Shepherd, and I his sheep. If in spirit I behold the Father sitting upon the throne, my Jesus stands close by: why then should I tremble, when He, who, as God, is God’s eternal Son, is my advocate? If I sin, behold, even before I repent intercession is made for me. Behold, when I fall, before I have risen Jesus stands for me before God; shows his wounds, which flowed too for

* “And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.”
(Rev. i. 17.)

me, and says : ' If a rod must be broken, break it upon me : this poor sheep cannot perish : that I have promised him.' See, in this way the Surety intercedes for his sinners before the Father—that is, he puts himself in our place ; in all cases steps in for us ; and inasmuch as the Intercessor is God himself, it follows, as a matter of course, that in the moment in which the advocacy and intercession takes place, it is accepted.

Behold, my brethren, such is the nature of our security. Arise, then, and let us enjoy the delights of Easter : and in the presence of our enemies be glad, and rejoice in our victory. Come, then, all who have any thing against us ! Come on, ye devils out of hell ! Ye angels ; ye mighty heroes, with the bright, pure, holy eyes ! Moses, ' thou earnest watchman, come hither from thy cloudy mountain ! Come ye human accusers, ye living, and ye dead ! Thou internal witness, take thy seat upon thy throne ! We will make your work easy, ye hostile spirits ! Before ye accuse, we will confess : yes ! we are altogether deceitful and corrupt—not a fibre in us that is good, not a breath without sin ; the sand of the sea represents our sins and the number of them ; Lebanon, that rises up to heaven, their height and weight ; the scarlet, their colour ! Yes, we confess it ; from hour to hour the mountain of our guilt grows higher ; its greatness is gigantic ! and we have, not once, but a thousand

times, deserved curse and damnation. But, nevertheless, what have ye to do with us? Behold under our feet this tree, and these stones; and, over our head, this royal throne and this priestly seat! Come on then! "Who is he that condemneth?"—Ha! the curse cleaves to your neck! Away, ye hateful accusers! Be dumb! be dumb! Hark! a voice of thunder is heard from heaven: "Touch not mine anointed: Speak comfortably with Jerusalem!" Hear ye it? The tongue must dry up that would judge us. "Who is he that condemneth?"

Who is he that condemneth? That is our watchword: in want, and in death; in the time of falling and rising, Who is he that condemneth? "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." "And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the atonement." Amen.



THE CHARACTERISTICS
OF
A TRUE STATE OF GRACE.

ST. PAUL, in writing to his beloved Timothy (2 Eph. i. 12), exultingly exclaims, "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." By this he intends to say, 'Such is my decision with respect to the person of Him to whom I firmly cling; my investigation is terminated; I know the rock of my salvation.' He is no longer in doubt how it is with respect to himself, or concerning what he has to expect in future he is most vitally conscious of his acceptance with God, and already beholds his crown of life laid up for him in the safest keeping. Admirable and enviable state!—a state in which the individual binds death and Satan to his triumphal car, and victoriously soars above the sorrows of this present state, like the solar eagle above the mists of the Alpine vales. Our soul thirsts also after such a state, and in these sultry and oppressive seasons, more than ever.

Truly, it is an excellent thing that the heart be established. We have recently selected a path, calculated to conduct us nearer to this blissful aim. The object is serious and important, and we felt ourselves incited to attain to it by the eventful period in which we live. We universally felt, in the most lively manner, that in this critical and dangerous season, everything depended upon being firmly assured of our faith—of our having an immutable ground of consolation and of hope to stand upon—and of being able to walk safely and stedfastly upon it. We therefore resolved to undertake a revision of our most essential convictions, and the basis on which they rested; to inspect the armour in which we intended to face the troubles of the future, and the terrors of approaching death; and especially subject the fundamental articles of our faith—the article of the infallibility of Scripture, of the existence of a living God, and of a Saviour who is personally near us—to a new examination, in order to ascertain, with certainty, whether they are founded upon a reality, and may be depended upon, or otherwise: for we were fully conscious, that we had now to do with a vital apprehension of these elements of the Christian religion, and that he who is firmly rooted in them will overcome the world and every foe.

We therefore proposed a threefold question. We inquired whether the Bible—this basis of our

consolation—was in reality only an uncertain and wavering foundation, as thousands at present assert; or whether it indubitably legitimated itself in all its parts as a Divine revelation. We inquired, whether those doctrines, which are dearest to us, and serve more especially as a resting-place for us in this stormy period, are in fact, as many would induce us to believe, only phantoms of the imagination, and human inventions, or whether they are founded on the word of God. We inquired, whether the reasons by which we feel justified in numbering ourselves with the people of God, were really destitute of stability and of demonstration; or whether we had judged correctly. You know the cheering results at which we arrived by investigating the first of these points. We found that the Scriptures, in more than one respect, bore the impress of an immediate Divine revelation on their forehead; and that, to express it in the mildest terms, it was irrational to refuse credence to them. You know how the second question was decided, so that our most estimable articles of the propitiation of Christ, justification, and of our preservation in grace, were founded in the most unequivocal manner upon the letter of Scripture. The truth of the object of our faith, therefore, is placed beyond a doubt. We know in what, and on whom, we believe. But the third question still remains unanswered. Are we justified in reckoning ourselves amongst the child-

ren of God and the heirs of heaven? This we shall now investigate. May God grant that we may arrive at equally as pleasing a result with reference to this point, as we did with regard to the others!

2 COR. xiii. 5.

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

THAT to which the Apostle urges us, in the words we have read, is the duty of recollection, introversion, and self-examination. He calls upon us to prove our own selves, and ascertain whether we may correctly number ourselves with God's people, or are only so in name, and belong to those that are without. Let us, therefore, listen to the Apostolic admonition, and undertake this most serious occupation, whatever the result may be. We do not inquire of any human system, nor of traditionary doctrine; but of the word of God itself, whence it is that we may infer that we are really in a state of grace; and after having ascertained it, we will try our hearts by the criterion we have found, and judge of ourselves according to it.

Which are, therefore, the characteristics of a true state of grace?

In replying to this question, we will consider,—

- I. The characteristics which are not requisite ;
- II. Those which are insufficient ;
- III. Those which are satisfactory, and at the same time indispensable.

I.

First of all, my friends, a word of consolation to us all. There have been, and still are, those who, from ignorance of the Scriptures, seek to render the appropriation of the evangelical promises dependent upon conditions, which we must reject as unscriptural and extravagant. Such persons assert that we must attain to great heights in spirituality, before we can number ourselves with the children of God. According to them, we must purchase the consciousness of Divine adoption by the performance of certain moral obligations which no one on earth ever accomplished. If we are terrified at the difficulty of such superhuman requirements, and anxiously exclaim, 'Who then may believe that he is saved ?' we receive the discouraging reply, 'Truly, only a few ;' and the church of God is represented to us as an olive-tree after the harvest, with here and there a berry—but all besides is only fuel for the flame.

Persons, who, though they have an idea of the holiness of Jehovah, are still ignorant of the article of justification by faith, may easily be led to

suppose that a Christian is not at liberty to assure himself, with any certainty, of the good pleasure of God, until, with the Divine assistance, he has attained at least to some degree of perfect holiness and purity. Passages, such as "Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect;" "Be ye holy, for I am holy," &c., might easily strengthen them in this opinion. And certainly, considered from that point of view, their judgment does not appear so very incorrect and absurd. But we know that we possess, in Christ, that holiness which God makes the indispensable condition of our salvation, and that it by no means requires the manifestation of a personal *perfection* on our part, in order to attain to the inheritance of the saints in light. James calls himself a servant of God and of Jesus Christ, and yet, notwithstanding, is obliged to confess that "in many things we offend." John was certainly a very favourite child of God, and yet exclaims, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." Paul knew that nothing would be able to separate him from the love of God; but was this consciousness in any degree beclouded, by his finding a law in his members warring against the law in his mind?—not in the least. Paul had much to blame and reprove in the lives of the Corinthians and the Galatians; but does he on that account exclude them from grace? On the contrary, he calls them, as before, his brethren in

the Lord, saints in Christ, and even beloved of God; nor do we think that he addressed them, under such titles, merely by way of compliment. A person may be still far from having attained to perfection in holiness; yet have no need on that account to doubt that his name is written in the book of life. He may still walk in great weakness, and daily make many a slip; and yet he may be treading the narrow way, and be bound up in the bundle of life as certainly as any other, and equally possess the Divine favour. Personal immaculateness, therefore, belongs to those ideal characteristics, by which we have not to measure our standing. It is not by this criterion that God measures his children. The words, "Jesus receiveth sinners," will continue valid, with respect to all that are saved, even till their latest breath.

Now even as we have seen that the requirements with respect to the holiness of the children of God, are extremely exaggerated by many—so others, on the other hand, do not unfrequently make similar demands with regard to their faith. Who is ignorant of the brilliant and ideal forms which are brought forwards in glittering array, under the name of true Christians; for instance, in the declamatory harangues of poetic rationalists, or inexperienced preachers, who, though well-intentioned, are novices in the Christian course. Heaven is divested of its tints, in order to adorn this fanciful picture of the disciple of Jesus. The features of angels and

the blest are imprinted upon him ; the triumph and the victorious boldness of the just made perfect are transferred to the portrait of the Christian hero ; and thus results a man, who spends every day in the enjoyment of the same uninterrupted peace,—a man, who every moment waves, with a beaming countenance, the flag of victory over death and the grave—a man, who, at the thought of his last hour, never feels otherwise than as one who is weary at the thought of the hour of repose—a man, who in the fiery furnace of the bitterest sufferings, gives vent to nothing but hymns of praise and thanksgiving—a man, who breathes nothing but prayer, feels nothing but love ; who unweariedly dwells, with all that is within him, in the high and the holy place ; and who, whenever he has to engage in the conflict, immediately quenches his foes like a god, and wreathes his brows with victory as easily as another with flowers. This imaginary being, consisting solely of heavenly-mindedness, serenity, patience, strength, and valour, is held up to us as the representation of a true believer, and we are required to reflect ourselves in it, and to measure ourselves by it. It is true, we might be such Christians as these people describe ; and would be so in reality, if we better understood how to draw from the wells of Jesus' merits, and to make a better use of the privileges that are given us. But we are not such, except on rare occasions. Ought we

on this account to renounce the belief in the genuineness of our Christianity ? Be it far from us ! A man's faith may be extremely weak, he may writhe in the dust like a worm that is trodden upon, and be unable to utter any thing but the expression of Paul, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death !" or say with Daniel, "There remains no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me ;" or with Peter, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man !" or with the disciples in the vessel, "Lord, save us, we perish !" and yet he may be a true sheep of the flock of Christ, and unspeakably dear to the Almighty. Away, therefore, with this false and pompous standard and weight. These are not the balances of the sanctuary.

Finally, there are those, who are unacquainted with the kingdom of darkness, and know nothing of the fiery darts of the wicked one, from which the children of God have not unfrequently much to suffer. These inexperienced people imagine that the interior of a true Christian is a holy temple, in which only that which is Divine is transacted ; in which, day and night, nothing but psalms and hymns resound to the honour of Jehovah ; in which nothing but heavenly desires and thoughts manifest themselves, and where no discord any longer interrupts the pure harmony of the praises of God. These people also are unfit to provide us with the

true criterion by which we ought to measure ourselves, and pronounce upon our state. They would reject us on the spot if we were to tell them what we occasionally experience within us, and rank us without ceremony amongst those that are without. Would to God it were the case, that an uninterrupted harmony of thanksgiving and praise to the Lord pervaded our souls ! But what infernal and fiery darts occasionally rush through our minds ; what a whirlwind and hurricane Satan is able to excite, even in the heart of a man of God, when he interrupts the inward harmony by the most blasphemous ideas ; when he hurls thoughts into the soul, at which our hair stands on end ; when he inwardly attacks us with incitements which are more execrable than can be uttered, and stirs up lusts within us which are so abominable that we scarcely knew them in an unconverted state, and so powerful that we are obliged to assemble the whole strength of our faith to face and overcome them ! We need only suffer a word to escape concerning these things, in the presence of the individuals just mentioned, and they would not hesitate a moment to pronounce our whole religion an unheard-of self-deception and a presumptuous imagination. And yet perhaps very unjustly ; for all these dreadful things may happen in the soul of an individual, who is nevertheless a man of God, washed from his sins in the blood of Christ, and

bound up in the bundle of life with the righteous. We therefore protest also against this criterion; for it is not scriptural, nor is it given by God. This perfect harmony of the inward temple belongs no less to the characteristics that are not requisite, than the before-mentioned spotless purity of our being, and the uninterrupted strength of faith of the inner man.

II.

I doubt not, my friends, that what has been premised has afforded some encouragement to many of you. I even hear you say, 'We are now really less afraid of an examination of our state, than at first, and our hopes of a pleasing result begin to be strengthened and confirmed.' If this is the case, we congratulate you—God grant that, in our further reflections, no abyss may disclose itself, and again swallow up your hopes!

You have just heard, what is *not* requisite to be found in you, in order that you may assure yourselves of the favour of God in Christ. Which are the grounds, therefore, upon which you base the belief in your Divine adoption? You tell me, in reply, 'I believe the word of God in all its extent, from Genesis to Revelations!' You do well to do so, my friend;—but yet this is no mark of your adoption. Do you not know, that the devils likewise believe and tremble? Did not Balaam believe, and yet went to hell? Your faith is perhaps only

idleness, stupidity, and a mimicking of others. My friend, this mark does not suffice. Prove the genuineness of your faith.

You say, 'I take pleasure in the word of God.' This may be something more, or it may not. How many hundreds of authors, poets, and philosophers, have taken delight in the word of God—and do so still—and yet it is very doubtful whether we shall meet them in the abodes of bliss. It is an easy matter to acquire a feeling of interest for the contents of Scripture.—Proceed therefore.

'I love the public worship of God.' This I did likewise, before there was a spark of grace in me. The singing delighted me, and it was a pleasing amusement to hear a sermon, and to criticise it. What more ?

'I mix with Christians, and am fond of them.' Really ! This also is well ; but why should you not do so ? since they are the most honest, upright, and amiable people, and you learnt to know and honour them as such from your youth up, and perhaps even from the example of your parents. But you know also what John writes concerning certain individuals, who had long adhered to the church of Jesus, yet left it at last ; and John then wrote, "They were not of us." Therefore show better attestations of your state of grace.

'I pray.' Come, that is something more worth listening to. You are thinking of the Lord's words to Ananias, "Behold, he prayeth !" when recom-

mending Saul to him. But think also of what our Lord says elsewhere :—"Not all that say unto me 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven;" and that prayer in itself is no infallible sign of an inward conversion, since Pharisees and even devils pray. Therefore proceed.

'I lead an exemplary life.' What is that you are saying? O poor man! this probably escaped you accidentally, or do you really mean it? O then think only of the rich young ruler—how exemplary he had lived, and yet how far he was from the kingdom of God! Give us, therefore, better and surer marks. What—are you silent? Have you nothing more to urge why you reckon yourself amongst the people of God?—are you already at a loss?

Let me therefore assist you in the search. Have you never experienced any thing of awakening repentance, inward consolation, &c.? Answer me. 'Yes,' say you, 'some particular expression once cut me to the heart, and I felt I must become another man.' But do you not know that not all are saved who are roused from sleep; and that the seed which fell upon stony places, although it rapidly grew up, soon withered away again, because it had no root? Hence, even the being awakened is no sufficient ground on which to build.

Tell me, are you acquainted with sorrow for sin, and the tears of repentance? 'Yes,' you say, 'I

know them. I once made my couch wet with tears because of my transgressions.' This is good; you had sufficient reason. But Cain and Judas both wept over their crimes, and went mourning to hell. Therefore your tears are no conclusive argument in favour of your adoption.

Tell me, have you ever felt any of the consolations of the Gospel in your hearts? 'Oh,' you reply, 'the Gospel has often comforted me.' You know therefore how sweet it is; but do not rely too much upon that. There have been those, in every age, who appropriated to themselves the consolations of the Gospel, who nevertheless perished; because with unwashed hands they seized upon a jewel which did not belong to them.

But say, are you also bold enough openly to profess the name of Jesus, and not be ashamed of his Gospel? 'Yes,' you reply, 'I have defended his cause with ardent zeal.' This is good, and something worth. But consider that those who are the most stiffly orthodox as to the letter, are often dead as to the spirit; and are the most violent in the defence of the Gospel, because it forms their system, and they do not wish to be regarded as believing anything irrational: consequently the confessing, and even bearing reproach for the sake of it, is no infallible sign that we are in a state of grace.

But, now, how is it? Are these all the proofs you have to adduce in favour of your adoption?

Have you really nothing further to bring forward to attest your state of grace—or even, perhaps, still less than what we have just adduced? If this be the case, I must decide according to the standard of the word of a faithful God, that you are entirely destitute of a well-grounded reason for numbering yourself with the people of God; that many a preliminary drawing of Divine grace may have reached your heart; but that the seal and the impress of Christ's sheep is still wanting; and that you will never enter into the kingdom of God, unless your lukewarm *seeking* to enter in at the strait gate be changed into an ardent *striving*.

III.

‘This is hard,’ say you. That may be. But shall I give you falsehood instead of truth, because the latter is generally attended with goads and nails? Shall I come to you with sand instead of eye-salve, because the latter is pungent and causes pain? ‘But,’ say you, ‘if these characteristics do not justify us in numbering ourselves with the people of God, which are they that do?’ These, my friends, I will now briefly state to you—or rather, not I, but another. It is from the archives of the Holy Scriptures that I will bring forth and unfold to your view the Divine test and standard; and I am firmly convinced, that even as many now present will be terrified at the sight; so there will be many,

on the contrary, who will not only take fresh courage, but will also attain, with renewed certainty, to the conviction that they belong to the sheep of his pasture.

It is undeniably evident that the Saviour, in his beatitudes at the commencement of his Sermon on the Mount, had no other intention than that of presenting to our view the inward aspect of his true disciples and followers. Everything that is elsewhere adduced in Scripture as a characteristic of regeneration, and of true saving faith, is only a repetition or an enlargement of that which the Lord here mentions in pithy conciseness. The features of spiritual life, which our Lord connects together in these beatitudes, form, as a whole, the essence and substance of the new creature—the character of that inner man, which is created according to God, and without whose existence, all outward godliness is impure in the sight of God. These features must, therefore, all be found in us, if we are true Christians. All? Yes, from first to last. But do not be too much alarmed at this little word ‘*all*.’ The case with these characteristics is this; where one of them exists in a real manifestation, there the germs of the whole are contained; even as they are all assuredly wanting where any one of them cannot be traced. It is true, indeed, that one or the other of these features may appear more strongly, prominently, and vitally impressed, whilst the rest return

more into the back ground of our being, and withdraw themselves from the eye. But if we only sound a little deeper, these will also be found ; for they are certainly in existence. The intervening cloud divides, and the stars we had missed again present themselves to view.

Which, therefore, are the spiritual lineaments and characteristic features of the true children of God ? The *first* is, *spiritual poverty*. The Lord pronounces them blessed, and solemnly bequeaths them his heaven. Read the Scriptures ; it is everywhere adduced as an indispensable mark of Divine adoption. God dwells only with the humble ; promises health and peace only to the contrite in heart ; He elevates only that which is lowly from the dust ; while those that are something in their own estimation he hurls from their throne, and gives grace to the humble. Unable to help ourselves—desponding of all our own righteousness and strength, with reference to salvation—ignorant whither to turn, unless the hand of mercy be extended towards us—destitute of any other consolation than that of free grace—this is being spiritually poor. Brethren, do you feel that this is the case with you ? is this feeling true ? is it heart-felt ? is it vital ? does it drive you out of yourselves to seize the hand stretched out from the clouds ? and does it impel you to seek that refuge which is set before you in the Gospel ? O, then, I congrat-

ulate you! You possess a feature of the life of grace, and if it be of the right kind, it comprises within it all the rest. 'But how am I to know that it is of the right kind?' What! dost thou doubt of it? Examine, therefore, whether any of the other features, which are of the right kind, are to be found in thee. If one be right, feel assured that they all are.

A *second* characteristic mark of the Divine nature is, the being *a mourner*. The Saviour pronounces his blessing on such a one, and promises him abundant consolation. It is sorrow for sin which is here implied. Look at the Bible, in any part you please, the new man everywhere appears with the mournful features of godly sorrow; a profound grief at having offended the Saviour, and a painful regret for having so ill repaid his goodness and loving kindness. Are you acquainted with this holy sorrow? Do you find these costly tears on the eye-lashes of your inner man? Do you also experience, when having once denied Him who so cordially took your part, how love can sit in your heart and weep; and how all that is within you urges and impels you to fall, like an affectionate child, upon the neck of the dear and ill-treated Saviour, with tears or conciliating kisses? I do not mean what is generally understood by the word repentance; I do not speak of the act of the first self-condemnation: I speak of something perma-

ment, something that is constantly returning ; of that incessant grief at the coldness of our hearts, and the poor thanks we pay the Lord ; and of that pain of soul which has no need to disturb the peace of the heart, but which, as long as we dwell in this mortal tabernacle, always more or less mingles itself with the joy of the saints, and gives it its tranquil and thoughtful character. O, if you know it, happy are you ! You discover in it a new token that you are not of them that are without.

A *third* essential feature of the new creature is *meekness*. The Lord blesses it ; it shall inherit the earth. It is, first of all, not that quality which we generally understand by the term ; it is a calm submission to all that God appoints ; it is the being satisfied with the way by which the Lord leads us, and a being passive under his operation ; it is the desire to be saved by grace, through faith, without the merit of works, and the sincere offering up of ourselves to all the will of God. I do not say that this childlike willingness must not sometimes pass through severe conflicts ; but it exists nevertheless, and always forms one of the elements of the renewed mind. If it were not in thee, thou wouldst not be a Christian. But tell me, dost thou not, on closer inspection, find it within thee, however deeply concealed ? Rejoice, thou hast made a valuable and promising discovery.

The *fourth* feature of a child of God, is *hunger-*

ing and thirsting after righteousness. The Lord pronounces it blessed, and promises it eternal satiety. It is the unceasing seeking of Paul to be found, not in his own, but in that righteousness which God imputes to faith. It is the desire breathed forth in those words of an ancient pious writer, "I would condemn my own soul, if I found in it any other righteousness than that of my Surety." It is the sentiment so beautifully expressed by Tersteegen :

" Had I an angel's holiness,
I'd lay aside that beauteous dress
And wrap me up in Christ."

It is the being unable to rest until we know that we are beloved in Christ, and acceptable in the sight of God ; until we can say with Paul, " Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Where this holy desire, this languishing for that beautiful robe in which alone we can please God, is wanting—every thing is wanting. But where this thirst is experienced, there it is like the quivering of the divining-rod over a rich mine ; it is like a mysterious little flame, which points out the existence of the whole new fulness of life.

The *fifth* feature of the new man is *mercy*. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." Where any one of the characteristics hitherto mentioned exists, there this cannot fail. I

do not say that a true Christian, in seasons of temptation and from weakness, may not exemplify the opposite quality. But mercy must be a fundamental element of his being—or his religion is all a delusion. One individual possesses, from his birth, a more harsh and unmerciful disposition than another ; and hence it may be the case, that even in a state of grace he may find it more difficult to overcome than many of his brethren, and to manifest a kind, obliging, and merciful deportment. But he means well with every one, from the bottom of his soul, and most sincerely wishes them all the same salvation of which he has become the recipient. He weeps over, judges, and condemns the bitter root, as soon as he is conscious of it within him. He commences an attack upon it with holy zeal, and in a vital apprehension and enjoyment of the grace and mercy which God has bestowed upon him—he finds it increasingly easy to feel compassion and exercise mercy.

A pure heart is the *sixth* requirement. They only who are pure in heart—is the universal language of Scripture—shall see God. This characteristic is the most important, and the most deserving of consideration of all ; because it forms the surest test by which the genuineness of all the rest may be tried. Where purity of heart is wanting—there all is deception and illusion, however many other marks of adoption thou mayest find

within thee. Not one of the signatures of the children of God can be genuine and exist in thee in a real form. You are terrified. Be so! But do not feel alarmed without cause and reason. Certainly, when the Lord speaks of a pure heart, he does not mean—as we should be inclined to suppose—a heart that is free from self-righteousness; but the expression is to be understood according to its obvious and literal acceptation. The Lord speaks of a purified heart—a heart delivered from the dominion of sin. We are not, indeed, to understand by the expression, such a heart in which no sinful thought nor impure lust any longer rises up; for where is such a heart to be found?—but a pure heart, according to the meaning of the Saviour, is one that has solemnly and formally renounced sin—that is most decidedly opposed to the kingdom of darkness—that involuntarily strives to expel that impure element from it, as the sea the dead body—that with all earnestness and zeal, not only delights in the law of God, but also seeks to obey it to the utmost—that judges severely and without dissimulation of its transgressions, and cannot pacify itself for its faults in any other manner than by the blood of Christ. Where this inward conflict against sin is wanting—where this lively, decided, and immutable delight and love to all that is holy, pure, and Divine, is not discoverable—there every characteristic of the children of God is wanting along

with it. On the contrary, where this characteristic vitally exists, there all the others will inevitably be found.

See, my friends, this is the balance of the sanctuary; this is the only right and infallible criterion by which you ought to measure your state. Proceed therefore to the examination! How is it with you? Are you still able to number yourselves with the children of Zion? What! are you mute? do you cast down your eyes, and despond? How is this, my brethren? Has it just now been written on your walls, "Weighed—and found wanting?" Are you become conscious that the pleasing and favourable opinion you have hitherto had of yourselves has been only a deception and delusion of the adversary? I beseech you, speak? 'Ah,' I hear you say, 'I do not find that which is the most essential of all—I do not find that I possess a pure heart. O, I cannot say how sinful I feel, and how much pain and sorrow it occasions me!'

And you? 'Alas!' you complain, 'I am not merciful. O if you knew how obdurate and unmerciful, and attached to that which is still earthly, I feel! O, who will deliver me from these fetters, so that I also may hope that I belong to the flock of Christ!'

And you? 'Wretch that I am, I do not feel a hungering and thirsting after the Lord Jesus! I

perceive how every thing within me ought to cling to this only Saviour, to him who is supremely lovely. But how cold is my love, how lukewarm my desire after him, my longing how faint, how devoid of ardour !

And are these all, ye mourners,—all the complaints you have to make ? ‘ Ah ! ’ you reply, ‘ are not these sufficient ? ’ O, yes ; sufficient to cause you to mourn, but much too little to make you despond ! O do not mistake yourselves, ye timid souls ! you, who complain of the want of purity of heart, know, that what *you* do not see within you, is this moment most obvious to us. For that very thing which you cannot find, is most apparent to us, in your sorrow, your mourning, your sighs, and your tears. For has not sin become a cross to you, a burden, and even the greatest of all your burdens ? Do you not long, from your very soul, to be freed from it ; and do you not long more ardently and strenuously after this, than after any thing else ? You have therefore quarrelled with sin. It no longer governs you, but you rule over it. Know, then, that this is itself the *pure* heart of which the Saviour speaks. Be of good cheer, therefore ; grace has already commenced its operation within you.

You, who pronounce yourself unmerciful, what shall I say to you ? Does not your accusation prove its own nullity ? Your grief at it becomes

your advocate. Your deep and sincere sorrow, that you are not more loving, is a witness that you love. Yes, even this characteristic of adoption is found within you, through whatever conflicts with an obdurate disposition it may have to struggle.

And lastly, you who accuse yourself of not hungering and thirsting after Christ, do not pronounce any incorrect judgment upon yourself. What is your weeping and grieving that you do not thirst more ardently after Jesus than an ardent thirst after him? What is your longing, which causes you to exclaim, "O that I longed more fervently after his presence," but a real and vital longing after his fellowship? Away therefore with cares which have no foundation; and cleave to the maxim, that wherever any one of these signatures of the new life is vividly impressed, the germs of all are contained in it.

O happy, therefore, is he, to whom neither a mere unstable hope nor a fallible human opinion, but an unequivocal Divine impress on his soul, bears witness that he is not of this world, but chosen out of this world. Let such a one proceed joyfully upon his way. The love of God is the banner over him, and the wings of eternal compassion cover him. Already translated with Christ into the heavenly places, he sees the world and sin, death and the devil, lying vanquished at his feet. "Who is he that condemneth?" is his watchword; "who will

separate us from the love of God ?" the inscription upon his standard: "Tread, O my soul, upon the mighty," is his war cry ; and let him joyfully exult to the harmonious chords of his harp, and exclaim, "The everlasting hills are become our inheritance." Amen.

THE ABUSE
OF THE
DOCTRINE OF FREE GRACE.

WHAT is the principal thing in Christianity? On what does all finally depend, and what is the surest sign of a state of grace? These questions, my brethren, are not difficult to answer. The principal thing, and the surest touchstone of Christianity, is this: that our godliness should shine forth in our life, business, and all our walk and conversation; in our sufferings, in avoiding of evil, in patience, in meekness, in placability, in compassion, in industry, and in a faithful discharge of our daily calling. "Let your light so shine before men," said the Lord, "that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." "By their fruit ye shall know them." "Show me thy faith by thy works," says James. And Paul says, "Though

I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." "Ye are," exclaimed Peter, "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." In these, and many other passages of Holy Scripture, all our boasted godliness and fancied merit, are pronounced worthless and hypocritical; yea, even judged and condemned, when they do not so affect our hearts, as to produce a virtuous life, fruitful in good works. "Without holiness," says God, "no man shall see the Lord." And in the first epistle of St. John we find, "He that committeth sin, is of the devil; and whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot commit sin, because he is born of God." "Whosoever is born of God, sinneth not." This is a remarkable passage; how are we to understand it? Are they who are born again really free from all sin? Need they no longer daily renew the complaints and sighs of a contrite heart, that they have been so remiss in their most sacred obligations; in love to their God, and to their brethren? Doth not John himself

declare, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us;" yea, we make God a liar. How then can we bring these two passages, which seem to contradict each other, into unison? This will not be so difficult, my brethren, if we look more closely at the context. John tells us explicitly why the regenerated do not sin. He says, "He doth not commit sin, because his seed (the seed of God, the seed of the new life from God, Christ Jesus, who is the true life) remaineth in him. Whosoever is truly born of God, has obtained another nature, a new life: he is become a new creature in Christ Jesus; he sees sin in its most frightful form, and abhors it as the greatest evil; he hates it as an act of enmity towards God—as the murderer of his Saviour, his own life, his salvation. Nothing is so horrible, so odious to him, as sin; he bears in his heart a deep and sincere desire, and an earnest prayer renewed daily and hourly, to be delivered from the bondage of this tyrant, and to serve the Lord in the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. The Saviour has enlightened him from pure mercy, so that he has recognized his wretched condition through sin; He has atoned for his sins by the death struggle on the cross; He has forgiven his transgressions, and purified him in his own blood, and made him blessed and holy, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. This astonishing grace, this unspeakable

mercy has eternally estranged him from sin ;—sin has become detestable to him, it is a crying abomination, a most unnatural ingratitude, and therefore he hates, avoids, flies, and curses sin ; and prays, strives, sighs, and uses his utmost endeavours to root it from his heart. But how is this possible ? Doth not the seed of the serpent yet reign within him ? Do not the most beloved children of grace still sigh and groan under the weight of their transgressions ? Is not the Christian's pillow often moistened with the tears of godly sorrow and repentance ? Truly it is, but yet even in this distress and lamentation, this strife against sin, and this imploring of the sanctifying power of the blood of Christ, there is proof given, that he who is born again has received a new nature which cannot sin, to which sin is a strange, disgusting, and unfriendly element ; and that the old Adam, which exists in sin, has, nevertheless, received a death-wound which will by degrees cause his destruction.

We ought to try and examine ourselves, sincerely as before the sight of God, whether we know this new life by experience. Many deceive themselves, many pretend to have the seed of God in them, many imagine themselves in a state of grace when it is not so ; and the consequence of this will be, that they will turn the grace of God into licentiousness, and still continue to go on in sin. Where grace has really been experienced, it breathes death

against the pleasures of sin. We will now consider this so frequent an abuse—not of grace, but of the doctrine of grace. In thy light, oh Lord! shall we see light. Lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us, that we may be healed. Thy mercy is great to those that fear thee. How unnumbered are the wonders which thou doest to thy children! Thy bowels yearn with compassion; thou hadst pity upon the miserable, and didst give. Oh God! give us the eye of faith—thou gavest thine only beloved Son, thy heart's treasure, to be despised on earth, in the deepest lowliness, in contempt, to bear grief, death, and the curse; thou sufferedst him to be trodden under the foot of sinners, that thine enemies, thy despisers, might not be lost. Oh Lord! give us the eye of faith; give us a heart to understand heavenly things; let us but be aware of a part of thine, and thy Son our Saviour's overflowing mercy; then shall we for ever be removed into thy comfort, and show forth thy praise in time and in eternity. Give us to understand the true nature of sin, so that the name of Jesus may be precious to us above all things. Declare unto us something of the riches of thy compassion, of the stability of thy truth, of the unchangeableness of thy promises, of the all-sufficiency of the holy sacrifice on Golgotha, and especially of our own nothingness and our deep guilt, that it may lead us to depend daily on Thee, and to look to Thee for grace, as our

only means of existence. Oh, Lord! guard us from hypocrisy, which is an abomination to Thee. Let thy grace and truth dwell within us, that we may never, like the foolish virgins, call in vain: "Lord, Lord, open to us!" Grant us a pure, sincere, and upright heart, a spirit free from guile, a single eye! But if we are without the humble, child-like spirit; if, instead of truth itself, we have only the words of truth; and if we have only as yet attained to that degree of knowledge and sense which leaves us unfruitful, slothful, cold, proud, impure, without the daily fervent communion of prayer with Thee, without chastisement, without desire for sanctification; then remove the scales from our eyes, and break the whited sepulchre of our hearts, that from it we may issue in terror, and fall in sincere contrition at thy feet, to acknowledge from the deepest heartfelt experience, that Thou art perfect grace and truth. Then shall we, oppressed by hatred of sin, moved by thine unmerited love and faithfulness, animated by thy Spirit, clothed with the garment of thy righteousness, overpowered by thy free grace, "give diligence to make our calling and election sure, for if we do this we shall never fall." Lord, be merciful to us, and bless thy word to us! Amen.

ROM. vi. 1, 2.

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

GUIDED by these words, we will consider the abuse of the doctrine of grace under the three following heads:—

- I. How it is possible that the abuse of the doctrine of grace is so easy, and therefore so frequent and customary?
- II. That it is a crime, and therefore worthy of punishment.
- III. How can a man be delivered from that error, and attain the right use of this doctrine?

And while this important subject is under our consideration, may our merciful God shed his blessing upon us, and make his truth powerful in our hearts for Christ's sake.

Before, however, we commence a close examination of these three heads, we will make a few remarks upon the subject of grace in general. We are necessitated to do so by the words of our text, which stand in intimate connection with the preceding verses. In the fifth chapter St. Paul describes the riches of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. The riches of this grace are superabun-

dantly great ; so great that none can number them ; yea, speech will fail if they are only reflected upon. We, miserable, condemned, cursed, sinners, can and shall be saved in the midst of all our wretchedness. We have deserved that God should take no more heed of us, but leave us to take our course—the way of destruction. We have derided and despised his law, his love, his mercy, his truth, his representations, his entreaties, his calls to repentance, his earthly and spiritual blessings. Our conscience bears witness to the truth of this. It is written in burning characters which cannot be quenched, though you were to pour a sea of streams upon them. But, behold, all these sins God will overlook. The Lord of glory appeared to us, clothed in flesh and blood like ours, tangible and audible to our senses, like a human being, but poor ; he veiled the rays of his Divine majesty, that we might not fear him and flee from him ; but might draw near to him with child-like simplicity, as to our equal. Further, he stepped into the gap, he bowed himself beneath the law, and accomplished it as an obedient servant, for love of us, and in our stead. All he said and did was performed for our benefit, and it all has a meritorious property, and is all-sufficient as an expiation. Finally, he submitted to the torments of hell and condemnation, which we have deserved, and was made a curse instead of us, and died the bitter death of a male-

factor. "God made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

Yea, God offers a complete justification in the Son of his love, to all poor, miserable, condemned sinners. We may thus appear in his presence, not only free from the curse, from punishment and sin, but holy, righteous, guiltless, without blemish, clothed in the beaming, spotless robe of the righteousness of our Surety, in which even the eyes of the holy God can discern no stain of sin. We may approach the most wretched sinner, and say to him, "There is a Redeemer, a Comforter, a Surety, a Saviour for you, who can fill you with the peace of God, who can pour into your breast the most blessed hopes of future glory, who can even in the midst of the vale of tears build you a habitation of peace, against which all the waves, storms, and floods in the world, will spend their strength in vain! When his tears and prayers have been for some time answered, and he can lay hold of Jesus with the hand of faith, then the Saviour plucks him as a brand from the burning, and presents him before the presence of his Father as a pardoned child of God, to whom all things have worked together for good. Mark! not merely for his salvation, but for his good! It is true that we lost much—nay all by Adam's sin. The image of God was destroyed, and we are reduced to so power-

less a state, that we cannot stretch forth the withered hand to pluck the fruit from the tree of life. But behold ! listen ! be astonished, and pray !—there is a *free grace of God*, which without any respect of persons, can save to the uttermost, and pardon sins of the deepest dye ! We speak to all sinners—to old sinners, to young sinners, to adulterers, thieves, murderers, slanderers, blasphemers, the voluptuary, the deceiver, and the Sabbath-breaker—however deformed and soiled by sin, though they may deserve eternal condemnation a thousand-fold, we call to you aloud, our heart impressed with the sincerest love for your souls : Ye may now be delivered from all your guilt, yea even to-day ye may gain justification of life in Christ Jesus.

You need bring nothing of your own ; you can be cured permanently and gratuitously of all your own sins and misdeeds ; Jesus will absolve you from all ; and give you forgiveness of sins, a new birth, faith, sanctification, safety and glorification ; he will save you, convert, justify, favour, and bless you ; yea, he will dwell in you, and walk in you, and you shall be in him what he was and is, the holy and beloved one of God ! O my brethren, how blessed is the man, who, overcome by this free grace, is removed out of himself and incorporated with Christ. His grace swallows up all our sins, and all our evil, like a fathomless sea ; and introduces all the treasures of heavenly glory into

our souls. This grace raises us above all cares, and leads us to repose in the depths of the eternal love of God ; this grace finishes the work begun in us ; and never ceases from correcting, healing, strengthening, and blessing us ; it screens, and arms us against all the enemies of our salvation ; it helps us to bear our cross ; it conducts us through the narrow path of death, to the regions of eternal glory ; it constitutes our song of praise throughout eternity. Then what shall I say, my brothers and sisters, but that whosoever is born of this blessed mother, to the light of life ; whosoever has experienced any thing of the riches of its tenderness and truth, and has truly been convinced, by the light of God's word, of the depth and extent of his wretched condition, must feel that it is impossible to describe the value of this grace. We cannot sufficiently appreciate its unspeakable value ; the most ardent songs of praise are but poor and weak in comparison. And yet it is a melancholy truth, which bears fearful testimony to the deep corruption of the human heart, that though the prophets and apostles zealously applied themselves to guard this precious doctrine from corruption, yet it was necessary at all times, notwithstanding, and it is to the present day, to preach with unabated zeal against its abuse.

I.

We have already said that this abuse of the doctrine of the free grace of God in Christ Jesus, is very easy. Is it truly thus? If I am in danger of sinking in a deep and muddy stream, and a compassionate preserver throws himself into the water and rescues me at the hazard of his own life; should I forget my preserver and his deed of love, and throw myself afresh into the stream, the depths of which threatened to destroy me? Should I not rather, all my life long, be eager to testify my gratitude to my faithful benefactor? Should I not anxiously avoid the dark stream and its frightful depths, and sincerely hate and abhor it? O my brethren, whosoever has experienced real grace; who knows grace in its true character, and sees clearly that the Lord might justly have left him to perish, but that he has saved him, out of his free mercy, by the offering up of his own life; and not only that, but has also chosen him from the foundation of the world, looked upon him as a righteous child of God, and made him blessed to all eternity; he ought to dread nothing so much as a continuance in sin, and daily desire nothing more fervently than to be faithful to this Saviour until death. But, truly, this experience does not fall to the lot of every man, and hence has arisen the abuse of it. Men talk about free grace without having the slightest acquaintance with it from personal experience;

instead of living in the element of grace, they have nothing but a mere head-knowledge, or a superficial perception of it in their hearts ;—a complete rupture with the world, the flesh, and the devil, has not yet taken place ; the conscience sleeps the sleep of death, and Christ is regarded as a mere substitute, whom the sinner thinks will make up the deficiency of his own fancied merit. Thus the abuse of this doctrine becomes very easy. When the whole head, the whole heart is filled with false premises, how can we be surprised that they should lead to the most false—nay, infamous conclusions ? What wonder is it that such a man, who chatters about grace without having become acquainted with it from heartfelt experience, with the tears of repentance, should appropriate the kindness of this Redeemer to himself, in such a manner as to leave his heart and life unchanged. Only imagine to yourself a man who has yet to learn his deeply sinful condition in the sight of God. He hears how Christ has atoned for all ; how he has offered a perfect sacrifice for the salvation of sinners, that his blood washes out all sin ; that nothing further remains to be completed ; that man must be saved by free grace, without the merit of works ; he hears, that all which serves to advance a godly life and walk, must be bestowed by the Saviour ; and that we can do literally nothing without him. The sinner's own inability is to him welcome intel-

ligence ; it is like an agreeable pillow to repose on. ' This,' thinks he, ' may be turned to some account.' ' Thou hast sinned,' says he to himself, ' consequently the Saviour belongs to thee, he has blotted out thy sins ; his merits, his righteousness, are thine.' He torments himself, and labours to bring his opinions to these truths ; he appeals as being entirely orthodox to the promises of the word of God ; confirmed by the Heidelberg catechism,* he believes himself called to repel all the accusations of the law, and of his own conscience, and allows himself to go on quite smoothly, as though every thing were in the best possible condition. He has perhaps wept once over his sins ; has accused himself, by a few strong expressions, as a lost sinner ; has experienced the insufficiency of his own resolutions, and has deduced from a superficial insight into the demands of the law, that he cannot stand before God in his present state.

He now places Christ before him, and firmly persuades himself that he belongs to the elect of God, and that none can have aught against him. He troubles not himself as to whether he daily experiences the workings of grace in his heart, whether he is become a new creature, and sin is

* The Heidelberg catechism contained the confession of faith of the German Calvinists, and may be compared to the Westminster catechism.

destroyed within him ; he thinks that in his own perception of the doctrine of grace, and in the humble acknowledgments which he makes of his necessity of it, he possesses the fullest security that he belongs to the people of God ; and considers—truly in a manner which excites horror when closely viewed—that this and every other declaration of the Bible may be brought forward to justify his apparent Christianity. Yea, he may perhaps be a zealous advocate for free grace ; while he himself is still lying under the wrath of God, and has no spark of grace in his heart. Perhaps you think that this abuse of the doctrine of grace is of unfrequent occurrence ? By no means. Most men are sick of the same disease. Whence comes it, that you are so quiet, so careless, so happy, so confident, so gay, so merry, while you belong to the children of this world ? Wherewith do you comfort yourself ? You must die ; you are travelling towards eternity ! You must appear before the judgment-seat of God ; you have broken the law of God, and deserved the wrath of the Almighty. This you cannot deny. If your mouth says, No ! no ! your heart cries, Yea, Amen, it is true. How can your heart have rest while these truths are existing ; while the reproaches of your conscience are loud, and warnings of death, and the judgment to come, fill your breast ? “God is gracious,” you say ; and with this you try to cover your sins, and to still the

goadings of your conscience, as well as you can. But, in God's name how can you believe in the grace of that God whom you despise ; whose word and commandment you reject ; and whom you daily and hourly offend by your sins against him ? But you answer, notwithstanding, " God is merciful ;" and thus you continue in your sins, in your impenitence, in your enmity against God ; you lie and deceive, revel and rage, hate and covet, curse and swear ; and spend your day in vain tittle-tattle. Is not this abusing the grace of God ? Do we not continually abuse his long-suffering more and more, while we walk along the broad way of destruction as unconverted men ? But what shall we say of those who have really an insight into the grace of God, in the Gospel, and yet knowingly and willingly continue in their sins, or even only in one single sin ? Have these hypocrites disappeared, or can we speak of such persons as monsters, who are not to be met with in our country ? Would to God it were so, but sad experience teaches us to the contrary. Even here, among ourselves in this country, where the knowledge of Christianity has the pre-eminence ; where it is less subject to reproach than elsewhere ; where the name of the Lord Jesus is acknowledged, even in our neighbourhood, it is beyond all things necessary to warn you against the abuse of the doctrine of grace.* Even here there

* The author resides in a part of Germany (the valley of

is a very large number of such, who have certainly the appearance of leading a godly life, while they deny the power of it, and declare by their actions, that though they can talk fluently about free grace they have always resisted its chastisement, which would have subdued their ungodly dispositions. Alas ! there are but few who earnestly engage in a determined warfare against sin. Most persons content themselves with mere knowledge, thoughts, feelings, acknowledgments, and speeches ; while they, more or less, wilfully turn the comforting truths of the Gospel into a pillow for their sins to rest upon. Thus the free grace of God is extolled by many who openly continue in their sins ; and publicly mark themselves, by their pride or indolence ; by their judging arrogance and uncharitable speeches ; by their fraud and revelling ; by their falsehood, avarice, and other vices, as men who know not the true life in grace. We meet with many persons who are zealous defenders of the truth, while in the observance of their domestic and civil duties they come far behind the great mass of the carnally-minded and careless children of the world. They are always extolling the Saviour, his merits, his free mercy, while they daily make him

the river Wupper), the inhabitants of which are more prone to fall into the errors of a dead orthodoxy, than into the opposite extremes of a rationalism so prevalent in the rest of Protestant Germany.

the servant of sin. Men are anxious, truly, to be preserved from the curse, from the final punishment of sin ; but they submit to the dominion of this or that sin, without any serious combat. And if men are urgently called to combat sin, they call it all legality, while they make the Gospel, in a carnal manner, favour their indolence and impurity, and turn the doctrine of grace into an intoxicating draught, against the voice of the law and of their conscience. Alas! the number of those who are true believers, and who in all points grow up to the full measure of the stature of Christ, living in the element of free grace, with the greatest purity, is very small ; many, many hearts are filled with the leaven of the Pharisees ; and the dangerous disease of the abuse of the doctrine of grace, is an epidemic which snatches away numberless victims.

II.

But this is very melancholy—it cries to heaven, it is beyond all measure lamentable. For what is so criminal as for man to degrade Jesus to the rank of a servant of sin, and his Gospel to be a passport for all immorality, to a resting-place for his own indolence ? What ! has the Son of God trembled and mourned beneath the weight of thy sins ? has he endured the floods of torment, and the pains of hell ? has he, forsaken of God, hung upon the cross, and breathed out his precious life there, in order

that thou mightest in carnal indolence serve dead idols ? Behold, the Eternal God opens his whole heart to thee ; he follows thee, in all thy goings ; he blesses and delights thee in a thousand different ways ; he sets before thee the most splendid offers for the redemption of thy soul ; he sends his Divine grace to meet thee ; and is ready, like a tender mother, to take care of thee, to refresh thee ; and yet thou continuest with thy dead heart to praise his love with thy mouth, yet turning this same love into a cloak for thy wickedness. What are these sins which thou committest ? Are they not, as it were, so many blows from your hand, directed against the infinite love of God ? Are they not like the traitor-kiss of Judas, worthy of the deepest abhorrence ? Thou sayest, " God has chosen me, saved me, regenerated me ; he has snatched me as a brand from the burning ; he has forgiven me my sins ; he has received me among the number of his elect, and has embraced me with his free grace."

If God has done all this for thee, how canst thou endure the thought of daily crucifying thy merciful Redeemer afresh, and causing him to mourn ? Talk not of thine awakening, talk not of the grace of God ; thou hast as yet never known the hellish nature of sin, nor hast thou experienced the true meaning of pardon. If the Lord had chosen, saved, favoured, and blessed thee, shouldest thou not in deep humility bow thyself to the dust ? thy heartfelt love

for the God who has thus loved thee, should daily incite thee to gratitude: "For to this end hath God chosen us," says St. Paul, "that we should be holy and unblamable before him in love." If you can so far abuse the Gospel of the grace of God, as to bear to continue even in one single sin, without contrition, striving, and fighting against it, and without the most earnest wish to subdue it; you are a dreadful hypocrite, and your sins are by far more hateful and abominable than the sins of those who do not possess your knowledge. If, however, the abuse of the doctrine of grace is such a horrible and crying sin, such an unnatural wickedness, its punishment will likewise be fearful. We see a proof of this in Judas Iscariot, the traitor. This ungodly wretch imagined that he was in the favour of Jesus, and belonged to the number of his elect; but he deceived himself, it was not so. He was in secret alliance with sin. He was devoted to avarice; and he coveted, and stole, under the very eyes of Him whose disciple he pretended to be. He even journeyed about with the other Apostles; preached the name of Jesus; and who knows but that he was not more conversant with the doctrines of the Gospel than the rest of the Apostles put together? But what did it avail him? Discord gnawed at his vitals; an evil conscience tormented him as often as he came under his Master's eye; a warning from the lips of his Lord sounded in his

ear, as the thunder of the judgment ;—till at last the flames of despair, which consumed his vitals, burst forth—till he, finally, in the grasp of this despair, put an end to himself with horror and dread. Yea, if you apprehend the doctrine of grace, only carnally ; if you leave it as a useless treasure of knowledge, to dwell only in the head, instead of within the heart ; if you lend but a finger to Satan, while you pretend to be giving your whole hand to Jesus, and are knowingly and wilfully under the dominion of the least appearance of sin ; then you are on the direct road which Judas took to eternal damnation. The abuse of this doctrine is the most dreadful ingratitude, the most fearful mockery of the living God, which men can commit—the most hateful insult which we can show to the Lord.

What wonder is it that the Lord, who will not be mocked, threatens it with the most dreadful punishments ?

III.

Yea ! our compassionate God guards and warns us, that we may not in future receive our portion with the hypocrites. He assists us in his mercy, that we may be secured from the abuse of his grace, and may attain to the right and proper use of it. How does this appear ? how are we to attain to it ? We will shortly, in the last place, consider this. We have seen already how this abominable

sin is very easy to commit ; how common it is ; and how criminal, and therefore how worthy of punishment. If you have attentively and considerably followed what has been hitherto said, you will have remarked, that we spoke not so much of the abuse of grace itself, as of the abuse of the *doctrine* of grace. There is a wide difference between the two. The doctrine of grace may be viewed in a false, sinful light, and looked at only on one side, so as to have no influence—at least, no deep, essential influence—upon the reason and actions of the man. But is this possible with grace itself ? “God forbid,” says Paul, “that we which are dead to sin should live any longer therein !” True grace contains a death-blow to all sin, and a powerful incitement to all goodness. Whoever has truly found grace in the eyes of the Lord, has seen sin in all its most hateful forms, and knows its curse, its deserving of condemnation, and has engaged in warm combat against it ; bearing a bitter hatred towards it in his heart, and not even having any inward desire in his soul, but this, to consecrate his whole heart, his whole life to the Lord, who has in so unmerited a manner saved him, and drawn him to himself. But whosoever can grieve this Eternal Comforter, by even one single sin ; whosoever can reconcile his heart to take pleasure in any sinful deed or desire, has placed a phantom, an airy conception of his brain, in the stead of real

grace; and does not belong to those who have experienced the grace of God, and are become partakers of it. If you wish then to be freed from the abuse of grace, and to attain to the right use of it, behold I can give you no other advice than this: Learn to know the grace of God by experience. In grace alone, where it is in truth experienced, lies all-saving power. Learn to see what thou art in the sight of God; what thou deservest according to his law; learn to know, how it is only through his free mercy that thy salvation can be effected; and that he has effected it. You must descend from the proud height of your imagined righteousness, till you know yourself, as Paul did, to be the chief of sinners, who has deserved everlasting wrath, curse, damnation, and hell; but who is not worthy of the least benefit from God. When you have learned this in deep humility, then the grace of God will become great and precious to you; then you will perceive what a hateful hellish monster all sin, and every sin, is; then it will be your chief desire daily and hourly to destroy all and each sin; yea, then will your heart lay hold of the free grace of God, so that in the deepest heartfelt humility, love, and thankfulness, you will offer yourself as a living sacrifice for the great love wherewith the Lord has loved you, and will ever love you. Means of grace are not wanting to us. If it is the real intention of your heart—

and not only of your lips—to attain to grace ; if the Spirit of God has kindled a longing after God in you, then you will faithfully employ the word of God, prayer, and the holy sacraments ; and avoid all occasions of sin, and frivolous, vain, worldly society ; and strive with all your efforts, and all the powers at your command, to attain the goal—the everlasting blessedness of your soul.

Thus we return anew to begging and entreating you, and admonishing you in Christ's stead : "be ye reconciled to God." No longer reject the saving hand of your Surety ; fall at his feet, and become his blessed heritage. With all the riches of his house, with all the precious blood-bought treasures of his kingdom, with all his most holy merits, with his spotless righteousness, with endless peace, with joy which infinitely outweighs all earthly pleasures, the Everlasting Comforter appears before thy soul to crown it with grace and mercy. Oh, receive the presents of this bountiful Lord. Draw him towards thyself with all the treasures of his grace, and he will stablish, strengthen, and settle you in the blessed experience, that his grace shall never depart from you, nor the covenant of his peace fail.

THE TRUE CHURCH.

PSALM xlvi. 3—5.

Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof, [yet*] there is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall bless her, and that right early.

OUR Psalm is a leap with God over the wall; soaring above the heights of the earth; a joyful dance before the Ark of the Covenant. No tone of complaint, no trace of anxiety, is to be found in this song of triumph; though it may have been sung in a time of distress and affliction. The song breathes only the joyfulness of faith, and confidence is the soul of it. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble;" so the Psalm begins. "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge;" thus it ends. It boasts of the secure condition of the people of God; and of this we will speak, according to the indication of

* The word *yet*, only implied in the English version, is expressed in the German.

our text, in this last morning of the ecclesiastical year. We consider THE TRUE CHURCH, according to

its form: - - - *a city.*

its situation: - - *in the sea.*

its consolation: *she shall be glad.*

its safety: - - - *God is in the midst of her.*

I.

There is nothing more vexatious and intolerable to unbelievers, than that we draw so marked a line between the children of God and the children of the world, and are accustomed to represent the number of the former as so very small and inconsiderable. But we cannot help it. We do not make the difference; it is made by God himself; and is deeply rooted in the nature and essence of the two parties: and the Mouth of Truth itself says, in several places, that the number of those who are saved is small. Truly, all that are called are not chosen; and not every one belongs to the true church who bears its colours. Even you, our enemies, are used to say that of those who would be Christians,—but few are sincere. And you may be in the right. After deducting the Canaanites, the false brethren, the foolish Virgins, who have lamps but not oil; clouds without water; and the Issachars, who are their own product, and not that of the Spirit; there remains, in truth, but a small seed—a twinkling star in the vast clouded firmament; a

cottage in a garden of cucumbers. That which makes a true Christian is not a decent conduct and the ornament of a regular observance of the outward forms of religion: it is not the retiring from the diversions of the men of the world, and the language of Canaan: it is not the bowed head and the sullen look. Even correct belief is not sufficient. "There are many persons," says somebody, "who with a little heavenly light go to hell." The absence of sinfulness of the heart, and to have no wish, to desire nothing, but Jesus, and Jesus alone—the man on the Cross; his blood and his grace—and that from the bottom of the soul: this is the stamp on God's coin. Do not then mingle chaff and wheat together; do not attempt to unite what God has separated.

The flock of lambs of the chief Shepherd, that rose among thorns, that grain of salt amidst corruption, is called in our text a "*city*;" and that a *city of God*. The figure is familiar, and I would only say a few words by way of exhortation.

Truly, it is a strange city; little and insignificant; and yet of an extent equal to that of the world in which we live; stretching from pole to pole. But it will be one day gathered together from the dispersion, and be seen in one spot, in all its beauty and splendour. Every thing belonging to a city is found in this city of God. If you inquire after her foundation, it is a Rock that cannot be moved. If

you ask after her walls, the Lord is a wall of fire round about her:—"the Angel of the Lord encamps round them that fear him." If you ask for her bastions, fences, and pallisades, they are the perfections of our God that are around us: his wisdom, to guide us; his omnipotence, to protect us; his longanimity to bear us; and his grace, to justify and save us. Only one gate has the city, and that is strait; only one way that leads to it, and that is narrow. Whoever attempts to enter by another way, by stealth or by violence, over the walls or through the roof, is a thief and a robber. When we look out of our windows our eyes fall on beloved mountains, on holy places. Here lies Golgotha, there the Mount of Olives, here Gethsemane, there Bethlehem-Ephrata—all much-loved spots, that lie close about us: our city, therefore, is Jerusalem.

The city has its festivals, for instance, when a poor sinner repents; its assemblies, when the brethren live together in unity, and Jesus is in the midst of them; its concerts, when they speak together in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and Jesus touches the strings of their hearts: and its spectacles, when they sit at the foot of the Cross, beholding the Man with the crown of thorns, and his holy blood, as, making an atonement for sin, it flows from his wounds.

The city has likewise its market-place: there

it is proclaimed, "Come, ye that have no money : come, buy and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." It has also its council-chamber, where one presides who knows how to give good counsel. Its police too : this every citizen has in his heart,—the controlling power of the Spirit. Has it also its watchmen ? Surely it has : they stand on the walls and blow the trumpet, and cry aloud when they see the Bridegroom coming. And here and there stand guards upon the watch-towers, placed there by God, to see what hour the great clock of time has struck. And what do the guards announce in our days ? "Past midnight," they proclaim from the house-tops, and the whole city is in anxious expectation of things that are to come.

In this city now, as the text says, is "the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High." Now indeed, every house in which a child of God dwells, is a house of God : for the Lord dwells with his own, under one roof. Nay, every believer is a living temple. It is written, "I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." By the holy tabernacles we are to understand the various conditions and states of the soul, in which the saints are placed by the ordinances of God. There is one well lodged in the lofty rock of pure faith, where, regardless of the ebb and flow of the feelings of his heart, and raised far above all the alternations of spiritual tem-

perature in his soul, he sings, with Asaph, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee! and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee." Another must make shift in the cave of Adullam, and from year's end to year's end eat his bread with tears, and not be able to find comfort. Some dwell in the pleasant abode of a sweet, heartfelt communion with the Lord, basking in the sunshine of his love, and deeply feeling the refreshing beams of his countenance shining into their souls; so that they can only exclaim, "It is good for us to be here—here let us make tabernacles." Others, on the contrary, are confined in narrow, gloomy cells, and must dwell amidst darkness and doubts: their daily task is combat and conflict, labour and pains; and their breath but an effusion of sighs: so that they must be heartily glad when a faint ray of hope shines upon their gloom.

Oh, various are the dwellings in the city of God. One sits under the juniper, another under the apple-tree; one in the desert, another in the garden of roses; one in the cool arbour, another like a fugitive trembling dove, in the cleft of the rock; one in the tent, another in the vineyard; and so on. But all have their windows turned towards the East; and wherever each happens to dwell with his soul, in whatever condition or situation, he is content. God has placed him there; and therefore his dwelling is holy—a dwelling of God; and this even

were it a narrow cell, or a dark pit, if only the pit be in the city of God. For we know whither we are going: our stay on earth is but a short sojourn: beyond Jordan, better tabernacles are erected for us.

Lastly: our text speaks of “streams” that flow into the city of God: and we know that the house of David and the citizens of Jerusalem have one main fountain, which is free and open, against all impurity and sin, and its name is Immanuel. Four nails and a spear have opened it: now it flows with exceeding abundance; and though people have bathed in it, and drunk of it, for thousands of years, yet its waters have not diminished. Around this fountain of health the city is continually assembled, with buckets and bowls consecrated by faith and prayer; and every cripple and beggar is at liberty to draw from it as much as he pleases for his daily use. Our fountain never dries up, never freezes; and if it now and then seems as if our buckets find, instead of water a hard crust of ice, yet it only seems so; our thirst is notwithstanding quenched, and the water only flows secretly and covertly into our souls.

This well of Jacob nourishes and refreshes us as it pleases; sometimes sensibly, sometimes secretly; now in immediate influxes, now through various indirect channels—as, by the word or sacrament, by the mouth of the brethren, or by their

experience and course of life ;—sometimes by a sign or image of nature, as Noah by the rainbow ;—sometimes by the direction of some event in our lives, or other means. In a thousand streams it pours its balsamic waves through the holy city ; in such a manner that almost every citizen of Jerusalem, besides the general fountain, has a spring of his own at his house-door to refresh him. One experiences the hearing of a prayer ; in which he possesses as long as he lives a private treasure and a fountain in his chamber, which every day revives and invigorates his courage. Another feels some promise singularly established and sealed in his heart ; so that to the end of his days it is to him bread and water and a pilgrim's staff in his right hand. One has a consoling verse, which is his daily music, and is more to him than the harp of David to Saul. Another sees a vision, or hears a noise, or what else he may internally see and hear, perceive and experience ; and this is a fountain in his house and chamber, which raises his head and keeps his leaves fresh and green, when the drought is come. In a word, hunger and thirst are not to be thought of on the Rock of Zion. Bread is given to all, and of water they have a never-failing supply.

II.

After having taken a view of the city, we now inquire after its situation ; and we learn from the

text that it lies in a roaring sea, and that the waves beat against the walls. So has it always lain ; and at all times has it been compared with the ship on the sea of Galilee in which the disciples cry, "Lord, save us ; we perish !" But the Lord commanded the storm and the waves, so that they passed over in safety. At one time the sea has beaten more furiously against the city than at others : nay, there have been times when it really appeared as if the city were entirely swallowed up, and buried in the deep : but in a moment it rose again above the waters, like a verdant and lovely island, and defied the winds and waves.

In our days the city of God still lies in the sea, and in the very midst of it, as it never lay before, God knows ! The enemies of the Cross all around are this sea. Who can discern the bounds of this ocean, which has cast us up ? who can fathom the depth of their enmity, rancour, perfidy, and malice ? Here and there the sea is already agitated by furious storms. Hearken, how the waves of false philosophy, and ungodly knowledge, beat more and more audaciously against the sacred wall ! See how the floods of hatred to Christ roll more and more madly and violently over the face of the earth ! Behold how the enemies more and more eagerly exert all the powers of intellect, all arts, to wage a war of extermination against the kingdom of the Lord, against the poor troop of

Israel, and his cause ! Already we see here and there a foaming of rage, and hear a gnashing of teeth, against the fold of Christ ; as if the complete outburst of their fury could no longer be restrained. Invention is at a loss to find new terms of abuse and reprobation to heap upon them : they are already spoken of as plague-spots, which afflict mankind, and which, if no other means can be found, must be extirpated with fire and sword.

A frightful and incessant cry of "Crucify, crucify !" sounds through the world against Jesus and his people. Crucify ! cries Fashion, which is already almost ashamed of the Christian name, and has raised Anti-christianity to the rank of the religion of the polite world. Crucify ! cries Etiquette, in the assemblies and circles of the great, whence Christ has long since been banished, and where no Christian word can enter duty free, and without ridicule and contempt. Crucify ! cry a thousand priests of Baal, who will have nothing but morality ; no Christ, no cross, no blood, no grace. Crucify ! cry almost all the journals, incessantly directing their batteries against true Christianity. Nay, to whatever side we turn our ears, to books and writings, to companies and circles, to the assemblies of the great and the polished, or the drinking-rooms of the vulgar and the low, to the workshops of the mechanics or to the cabinets of men in office, and the counting-houses of the mer-

chants—nay, even to lectures of professors, or the sermons of preachers—wherever we turn, before we hear but only one “Hosannah to the Son of David,” the fatal Crucify, crucify, rudely or politely, covertly or unreservedly expressed, a hundred or a thousand times assaults your ears. Thus do matters stand: so rage the waves of that sea whose breakers roar around the city of God.

But, my brethren, it will yet be worse. God’s watchmen proclaim it from the battlements, and more than one sign of these times indicates that the prophecy is hastening to its accomplishment. The passive waves will one day become billows of fire, and the murmur of the sea be converted into roaring and bellowing. Vast tracts of the ocean around Zion lie even now still and motionless: only in the depths below it boils, and storms, and rages. A fearful mass of rage and rancour has gradually collected against the Cross and its followers, and this powder-magazine waits but for the match, to blow up with a fearful explosion. The thousands that have already become Anti-christians, must still devour their gall and bitterness. The waves of Babel, which lie round Jerusalem like a calm, deep, treacherous sea, still lurk behind the dams; their fury is yet stayed. But who can tell how much longer? Every thing indicates that the time of a universal breach of the dams and bars is at hand, and that the great hour of temptation is

no longer distant. The sea is already prepared for a dreadful commotion: birds of ill omen, the precursors of the storm, already fly about with piercing cries that forebode nothing good. I will not name the blood-thirsty Inquisition in the West; how it rises with renewed vigour from its tomb, and is exerting itself to the utmost to re-establish the tribunals against heretics. I will not name those missionaries, who with mad fanaticism rage through the neighbouring kingdom of France. I will not name Jesuitism, which is again carrying on its intrigues, and in some parts is aiming at such a degree of power and influence that there is but too much foundation for the alarm with which the church looks upon its efforts. I will not speak of the blood-red sky in the South, of which no politician can calculate what it may bring forth, or how it may yet spread the glare of its fires. I will not dwell on the notes of alarm sounded by the trumpet of God, which in this time of agitation announces serious events. Enough! There is no want of indications of the most alarming kind, of screaming storm-birds on the ocean of our times; and tokens of the most various kinds unite to pre-sage to the city of God a day which shall burn like an oven, and glow like a furnace.

It is true, that many mountains still stand around us, to break the fury of the waves; and many a hill to protect the city of God. Thus, in

our country we have as a bulwark against the invasions of Babel, and against Anti-christian attacks, an Evangelical king, who is steadfastly attached to the true faith; and against the false prophet without, and his fanatical operations, we have horses and horsemen from many quarters. As a dam against the floods of false doctrine, we have the Bible Society, with its far-spreading branches; and for the enlargement and fortifying of our city of God, we have the invaluable mission, and hosts of Evangelical teachers. To nourish, strengthen, and refresh us, we have our beautiful Divine Service, and the preaching of the unadulterated Gospel. For our encouragement, we have beloved men of God, who zealously blow the trumpet around us, and encouragingly take us by the hand. But who will be our security, that, before we are aware, those mountains shall not also fall, those hills also give way, and all our supports sink into the breach? Then the waves of the sea might have their free course, and the city of God might be destroyed. Destroyed? No! not so; that can never be.

III.

Hear what the sweet Singer says in our Psalm: "Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, and though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof; [yet] there is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place

of the tabernacles of the Most High." Oh, what words of comfort! Are they not like a golden rainbow in the clouds, and like a float to the net, to keep it above water? They are sufficient at once to overcome all faint-heartedness, and to put to flight a whole host of timid thoughts. It is not the word of man, but the word of God, delivered by the mouth of man; and hence the power with which it is endowed. "Yet!" Oh, a precious yet! This Yet of our God, is more than those mountains and hills, which it, in fact, renders unnecessary. If we have this Yet in the hand of faith, what should alarm and make us uneasy? With this Yet we deprive the storms and the fiery waves of their terrors. With this Yet, we may stand with confidence on our walls; and, however gloomy the prospect, however the thunder-clouds may lower and the deep roar, we proclaim this Yet of our Lord: and though the storm were ever so great and awful, so that voices should call to us on all sides, "You are all fools, to hope where no hope is," we will not be confounded: our watchword is "Yet, Yet;" and we answer, 'What is impossible must become possible, sooner than that the city of God shall not be glad with its streams.' He has spoken the word. Amen.

And now, consider what unheard-of things are here promised to the congregation of God. Not only that they shall abide in the hour of temptation,

and be preserved from despondency and back-sliding : they shall even be glad with their streams, and blossom more fair than in times of peace. There are but few rejoicing Christians, yet we learn that it is no sin to be joyful in God. He who has no occasion to mourn, may lift up his head, and need not bow it down like a bulrush. We have cause and reason enough to be glad in the Lord, and to pass through life with a joyful spirit. For what do we yet want, we who are in Christ, and in Him have all that heart can desire ; we who go clothed in the purple of our King, and in his robe are glorious before the eyes of God ; we who know that our names are written in the book of life, and that our souls are in hands from which nothing and nobody can pluck them away ; we who have the assurance that He always loves us, and that He will preserve our treasure till the last day ; we who are certain that all our enemies already lie vanquished under our feet, and that one day, adorned with the crown of victory of our Surety, we shall cast anchor on the golden coast of the promised Land ? Nay, if we could, we might sit from morning till evening at the harp, and none could justly reproach us for being so glad. If we could, our whole life might be a dance, like that of David before the Ark of the Covenant ; and we might be drunk with the wine of the house of God, and, as the Prophet says, “make a noise as through wine, and be filled like

bowls, and as the corners of the cellar." God would have nothing against it; He would have pleasure in it. But the eye of our faith is so dim, and the hand of our confidence takes such loose hold; we look more to ourselves than to Christ, and will not seek in Him alone, but would also find something in ourselves: and hence it comes, that, with all our riches, we are so poor in joy, and that our treasure, which we have through grace, is like a talent buried in the earth, from which we do not even get the interest; and our life is miserable, like that of a poor beggar, and yet we are told, "All is yours."

This wretched life, however, shall one day cease in the city of God on earth; and, wonderful! just at the moment when it should seem to be only beginning in earnest—namely, when the sea around foams and rages in the height of its fury, and the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. But thus, too, it often fares with the individual Christian. When fierce temptations assail him, so that all his supports give way, and all the mountains and hills of his own power and will, and of his own righteousness, are overthrown, so that he must wholly lean on Christ, and be content with his grace; then, and not before, he becomes glad. And so it has fared with the Church of God on earth up to this very day. Never has she blossomed more fair, never has she shone in the night with brighter

splendour, than in evil days, in the time of persecution. Read the history of the Church ; it is even so. The most glorious stars in the firmament of the church, the most joyful confessors of the faith, became great amidst storms and tempests ; and never was the Bride of the Lamb on earth more gloriously adorned, than in the times of martyrdom, and of the martyrs whose path still shines up to this day. Their souls were naturally weak ; and when we are weak, then we are strong : then nothing remained to them but to go out of themselves, and to hide themselves in Christ ; and in Christ we can do every thing. And, indeed, if the Lord is ever with his people by his Spirit and his gifts, it is in such days of distress and affliction, when the sea roars and rages, and the mountains shake. Then he opens more wide the floodgates of his Divine power, and his refreshing streams flow more abundantly, and keep equal course with the sea of troubles and afflictions : the more violent the latter, the richer are the former, for the city of God shall be “ glad with its streams.”

And so, probably, matters will not change with the city of God in our vale ; which, on the whole, now really looks very mean, poor, and miserable, and is closely covered and hidden. Yes, truly : so long as the good days last, so long ye may go about languid and faint ; so long ye may be so full of complaints with your riches, and so bowed down

with your treasures, so cold in the embraces of your Bridegroom, so lukewarm and indifferent in the confession of His name ; so long you are permitted to continue your disputes and dissensions, to carry on your petty wars of opinion, and to indulge in idle speculations. But, I answer for it, at the final sound of the trumpet that shall announce to you the approach of the hour of temptation ; at the first deluge of the waves of the great struggle, which shall break in upon our valley ; every thing will be suddenly changed, and the city be glad with her streams. That which was faint will become lively, and that which was weak vigorous. Dissension will cease, and there will be a holding together and unity in love, to astonish the world. There will be no more disputing about the restoration of all things ; or whether there be a third place, &c ; but all will regard one place only, Jesus ! Jesus !—and be anxious only about complete restoration to His favour, His blood, and His wounds ; and in this strong-hold that which was separated will be again united. Then the covering will be removed, and the tender dove in the clefts of the rock will be seen to soar as with the eagles' wings, and sucklings shall be as the goodly horses in the battle ; and, as the Prophet says, they shall devour and subdue with slingstone. For “ though the sea roars and is troubled, and the mountains shake, there is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God ! ”

IV.

Oh, what a glorious prospect for the city of God, though the sky is darkened, and the clouds lower and threaten! How secure does the fair city lie, though in the midst of the sea, whose waves dash furiously against her walls! Her security, however, is not in herself, but in that Rock on which she is founded. "God is in the midst of her," and "helps her early:" "God is in the midst of her," as he is in each individual member; always working, not always felt; always active, not always to be traced; incessantly bearing, frequently without our knowledge; constantly blessing and fructifying, not always according to our wish, and often in secret. But he is always at hand. "This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell."

Blessed, my brethren, are the eyes that see what we see. Behold, one star sings to the other, and from one end of the heavens to the other it is proclaimed, "God is in the midst of her." Oh, how majestic is the step with which he now again passes through the world—not that he may judge the world, but that he may surround it with the wall of his city of God, and stretch forth the curtains of her habitation over the hills and over the sea! The prince of this world is cast out, and we see with rejoicing how the strong, pressed by the Stronger, is forced to abandon one province after another. Not a hoof remains behind of what the

Father has given to the Son. How does the faithful Shepherd call his sheep; and they hasten from every desert, and every rock, to fall on his breast, and repose in his bosom. How diligently does the great Reaper ply his sickle in the field of his harvest, and bring in the sheaves in abundance, as if winter were at hand, and haste were necessary that the last fruits might be brought home! Islands, that for thousands of years have awaited his coming, tremble with bliss at the sound of his feet; and dark heathen deserts grow light, because their Light comes and salutes with Hosannahs and Hallelujahs the day-spring from on high. The Hottentot sees the golden bark of the dearest of all guests land on his shores, and with bended knees welcomes the Lord of Glory. The man at the North Pole grows warm, on the heart of the most faithful Shepherd, and his ice-bound world blooms like a paradise after the Prince of Peace has entered. Yes; his footsteps are bright and glorious; and mighty voices proclaim from land to land, "God is in the midst of her." Nor has he either forgotten us—and though he may have latterly trodden less audibly among us, and less in the noonday than in former times, yet his footsteps are still in the valley, and we hear the tinkling of the bells that hang to his priestly garment. If but a few were added to his flock during the past year—and you well know, my beloved, that in this point we must not prescribe to

him, but leave him to take his own course ; for herein he faithfully follows a plan delivered to him in a holy Council before the beginning of the world—yet he has given manifold evidences of his presence in other ways. He has strengthened the weary hands of one, and upheld the sinking knees of another. The weak in spirit he has borne in the arms of his love, and counselled in due season those who struggled in doubt. He has brought one from the night of temptation into his light, and has bestowed upon another the crown of victory, after the fight was won. One he has made to hear his glad voice, saying, “Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee !” so that being now healed, he goes on his way rejoicing ; while by another providence he has relieved the heart of a second from its heavy burden. Thus there are, doubtless, many in the midst of us to-day, with cheerful, yet penitent countenances, who acknowledge with joy and humility, “The Lord hath done great things for me. Yea, the Lord is in the midst of us—therefore have I not been removed.” And truly, my beloved brethren, is not it an irrefragable proof that Immanuel was in the midst of us, that we have not been removed, that we still remain together on Jesus’ bosom and under Jesus’ standard, though the Devil daily roars around as if he would devour us ? And see ! how many a bed of pain is in the midst of us, where the bush of thorns has burnt the whole year through,

and yet has not been consumed ; how many a miserable family, where all was wanting, and yet the barrel of meal did not waste, nor the cruse of oil fail ; how many a pilgrim, who knew not what way to take, and yet now has passed Jordan ; how many a Jonah, who was about to sink into the deep, and now stands joyful and glorifying God on the shore ! For the prosperity of our Christian Institutions ; the happy success, far beyond all expectation, of our efforts in the cause of God, behold monument on monument, witness upon witness, praising His mercy, and loudly proclaiming, in the triumphant language of our Psalm, “ God is in the midst of her ! ”

And so long as a tent of Kedar shall stand in our valley, He will not depart from our valley. Jerusalem is his habitation and his rest for ever. Therefore let us not fear, since the Rock of Jacob is with us, and such a bulwark raised around us. He who bears arms against us, fights with God ; and it is dangerous to take the field against Him. Sooner shall the thorns overcome the fire, and the chaff resist the storm, than hell shall triumph over us, who have such a Defender.

“ He helps her early,” says the sacred minstrel : and truly this is the manner of our God. His help generally appears as the dawn of the morning after the night. His light, says the Prophet, breaks forth as the morning : and “ weeping may endure for

a night, but joy cometh in the morning." After the gloom of penance he gave us the kiss of love ; after the night of combat, he crowned us with victory : his glory shone upon us in the cave of Adul-lam ; and after wrestling till break of day, Jacob received his blessing. Therefore, let us not be afraid if a day of clouds and darkness should come over us ; He helps us early ; and so often as our sky is overcast, it is only that the sun may afterwards shine on us with more welcome and vivifying splendour. And in the darkness itself there is a blessing, a salutary seed in affliction. The church of God is like a palm-tree, which flourishes the more vigorously the more it is pressed down. Every embarrassment is to her but as the weight to the clock, which keeps it going ; and the most violent storms are to the church but a brisk wind in the sails, which impels the vessel more rapidly towards the harbour. And beyond her strength she is never tried—beyond her own, indeed, she may, but not beyond that which he lends us—and the desolation of Zion is not to be thought of to all eternity. The city stands fast and immovable, like the Mercy on which it is founded, and the Faithfulness which bears it up. "Not a bone of him shall be broken," it is written of our Immanuel. This word is in force even unto this day. "We are bone of his bone : who shall hurt us ?"

May the Lord strengthen us in the faith, that

we may walk cheerfully under the dark sky of this world, looking up to the glorious stars of promise that he has placed amidst the clouds! In this faith may he enclose us as in a fortress, so long as we weep in this vale of fogs and storms! In this faith we repose amidst the waves of temptation, like Noah in his Ark. In this faith we are secure, like a hero in his armour. Who will venture to attack us?

A ship by winds and waves in vain assail'd ;
Adventurer bold, whose courage ne'er has fail'd ;
Gold in the fiery furnace made more bright ;
A shield of adamant the foes to fright ;
Hero of God, that ne'er has lost the field ;
A child of grace, by foreign power upheld ;
Born where hell's sad and dreary confines lie,—
Such is our faith, in which we live and die,

THE
RANSOMED OF THE LORD.

ISAIAH xxxv. 10.

The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads ; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

It is a heart-enchanting picture, which Isaiah the Seer paints with glowing colours in the words of our text. It is the representation of that blissful and joyful period, which should gladden the world, after the appearing of the promised Morning-star above the horizon of the earth. This golden period, after the Surety had finished his work, and the Comforter had made his entry into the world, has actually arrived ; and the wonders which Isaiah describes in this chapter have already taken place, at least as regards their commencement, and do take place even to this hour. In the verse we have read, he gives a short, but very complete and comprehensive, description of the life of the citizens of the New Testament kingdom, and at the same time

points out to us its five gradations or periods. These periods in the life of the children of God, we will contemplate a little more closely on the present occasion.

- I. The period of return.
- II. That of the entry into Zion.
- III. The period of permanency.
- IV. The period of rejoicing.
- V. The period of fruition.

I.

The first vision which presents itself to our view, is of a peculiar kind—mournful and yet joyful; gloomy, and yet exciting to songs of praise; we see before us a troop of travellers. Who are these people, and from whence do they come? Were it from beholding their whole property reduced to ashes—they could not look more sorrowful than they now appear, whilst on their march; nor be more afflicted and weighed down with grief, were they returning from a place of interment, where they had buried both hope and joy, the sweetest companions of human life. Not a trace of peace or comfort is discoverable in the whole train. A sable banner waves before them. Ashes instead of garlands are upon every head; and in the appearance of each is only the expression of the profoundest affliction and the most oppressive anxiety. Whilst some melt into tears, others give

vent to their grief in loud sighs ; some beat, sobbing, upon their breasts, and despair seems to look forth from the visages of others. All are robbed of their repose—all seek some place of refuge, languishing for aid.

A richly decorated figure meets them on their way ; it is the world ! How kindly she looks upon the agonizing troop ! “Come,” says she, “I will comfort you ; I will cheer you again.” Thus saying, she presents them a cup—the cup of her dissipations, and shows them the wreath-crowned arena of her pleasure and delight, where they, who are now so mournful, were frequently so joyful. But all her allurements and enticements are in vain—they have lost their power. “Away, thou deceiver !” is their language to her. “Long enough did we lie at thy empty wells, and attempted to satisfy ourselves with thy unsatisfying husks. Miserable being, what we require, thou art unable to bestow !”

Another approaches the train, likewise with a benignant mien, but still more wicked than the world, and says, “You hope for mercy ? You hope in vain ! God is a severe and inexorable man ; follow me ; enjoy the world and its pleasures as long as you are permitted ; for remember that ye are lost.” But to this voice also no attention is paid.

An invisible being has already joined the weep-

ing host ; who catches with his powerful shield those fiery darts of Satan, which are intended to carry the gangrene of hopelessness into their souls, and keeps guard over the trembling troop, in order that, though they fear and despond, they may not fall a prey to the awful darkness of despair.

Thus they wander on, unspeakably distressed and dismayed. No man, no angel comforts them. Heaven above them is covered with black clouds, and the whole world around them seems to them as if enveloped in a shroud. Do you recognize this weeping train of wanderers ? It is the procession of publicans, of malefactors, of sobbing Magdalens ; the troop, which, awoke from the sleep of sin, has come to reflection—the people that have suffered the chastisement of the law.

“The Redeemed shall return,” it is said in our text. The redeemed ? Yes ; for so the prophet calls these weeping aid-imploring people, and that justly ; for they are already, in more than one respect, redeemed and free ; they are redeemed from the infernal prison of lies and self-deception. Previously, they had regarded themselves as righteous, or at least as those who had less to fear from any quarter than from that of God and eternity. But an invisible hand has now burst these bands of their blindness. The words “Peace ! peace !” are erased from their banner, and a “Wo, wo unto us !” is inscribed in their stead.

They are redeemed from sin's house of bondage. Formerly they were the servants of sin—aye, and its willing vassals and subjects ;—they were in alliance with sin. Now they stand at least inflamed with a Divine hatred against sin, under the banners of a Holy Leader, and secretly swear in their hearts, that they will not rest until they have completely and for ever shaken off the yoke of this horrible tyranny from their necks.

They are redeemed from the prison of the world. The world possessed their whole heart ; the world enchanted them with its empty joys, and imposed upon them in such a manner, that they did not venture to think and judge otherwise than this desperate tyrant thought and judged. They are now also free from this master ; and know that the whole world lieth in the wicked one.

They are redeemed from the chains of Satan. For years together, without knowing it, they stood under the sceptre of this dark monarch, and daily and hourly fulfilled his will. They now know the wicked one, and have most decidedly renounced his service. They yet know as little whom they have to thank for this deliverance, as they feel conscious of being delivered. But we know the wondrous Liberator, who descended into their dungeon, and loosed their chains ; we know the Mighty One who broke the yoke from off their shoulder, and translated them out of all the false ideas and

prejudices, by which they were taken captive from their youth up, into the resplendent light of truth. Who was it but the Holy Spirit, the Comforter—the Spirit of liberty, of truth, and of power!

It is thus they approach. Whither are they marching? They seek a place of refuge, in which they may be eternally safe; and this place glimmers towards them from a distance; it lies in the arms of Him who is the way, the truth, and the life. It is after His grace they hunger, thirst, and languish; to his fellowship is the flight of their ardent desires directed: “the redeemed return.”

II.

We change our point of view, and fix it in the city of God, in the congregation of the faithful. Oh, here it is lovely! it is good to be here! where the cross casts its hospitable shade, and where the peaceful waters flow, which emanate from the Saviour’s wounds. Glad to see ourselves there also, we stand within the walls of this Jerusalem.

All at once, new life pervades the streets of Zion. A joyful tumult reaches our ears, and soon we clearly distinguish now an Hosannah, and then a Hallelujah. We hasten nearer, and what do we perceive? The same wandering troop, which just before passed weeping and distressed before us. But what a totally different appearance do they now present! what a change has taken place with

these people! ashes are no longer on their heads: the expression of grief and anxiety has vanished from their countenances. Nothing but joy beams through every look, and instead of the standard of mourning, the banner of the cross flutters in the breeze, on which is inscribed, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits!" One exults aloud and cries, "I have obtained mercy!" Another, "I know that my Redeemer liveth!" A third, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want!" Some fall into each other's arms exclaiming, "Blessed be Jesus Christ!" and congratulations abound in another sense than that in which the world is wont to congratulate. It seems as if the ancient inhabitants of the city were all at once inspired with new animation by some spirit; a festival dawns in Zion, and hymns on the blood of the Lamb, and songs of praise to the name of Jesus and the free grace of God, ascend, like the sweet perfume of sacrifice, towards heaven. And soon do they begin to recount and relate; the one tells of a dove which brought him the olive-branch of peace; another boasts of an invisible door-keeper, who opened the heart of Jesus to him; a third praises a wonderful Comforter, who had audibly whispered to him, "Thou art received into favour." A fourth says, that he had been suddenly able to apprehend some particular promise, as if written in the Scriptures for none but him alone. A fifth, that after reading

the words, "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness," he could not do otherwise than joyfully number himself amongst those who are thus counted blessed, since he also experienced such a hunger and thirst. A sixth says, he knows not how he came by it, but in the heavenly peace of his soul he perceives the seal of the Lord's favour towards him. But all confess, that it is only now they begin to live; all are conscious with unspeakable delight, that their sins are forgiven them; all are heartily ready to lay themselves as living thank-offerings, for every service, on the altar of their infinitely beloved Lord and Saviour. "We are saved, eternally saved!" is the continual echo in their hearts; and so they really are, the happy troop; and were so, even when still afar off in fear and trembling; but now they know that they are so: and since they have known it, and have returned with songs unto Zion, they have entered into the second age and period of life of the citizens of God's kingdom.

But happy as they are, since they have obtained this assurance—yet they do not on that account stand on the loftiest summit of the Christian life; the state of permanent peace is not yet theirs. Perhaps, if we visit them again after the lapse of a few days, we shall find already a great alteration.

Many a harp already hangs upon the willows; and many a lip, instead of hymns of praise, pours

forth afresh only sighs and lamentations. One says, he has no longer any love; another is deficient in the desire for prayer, or in zeal for the Lord's glory; and a third has even been guilty of some unfaithfulness to his Saviour. And where do we now meet the very people, whom we had so lately left in Jerusalem's halls rejoicing? They are now sitting in Zion's penitentiaries; they are lying about in Jerusalem's lazarettos, temptation-cells and mournful retreats; for such-like nooks and habitations are to be found also in the city of God. Their language now is, We have rejoiced too soon; we deceived ourselves, and how is it possible that the Lord should take such pleasure in such as we?—and many other such self-accusations are heard.

This state of sorrow is certainly not permanent and abiding; it will change again. No sooner does a warm breath of the morning blow upon the heart, and agitate the frozen pool of godly feeling, than they again begin to make room for more favourable and joyful thoughts of their connexion with the Lord. Yes, they again rejoice and say, "Truly, I am the Lord's." But if the sensible grace departs, and the susceptible unction is removed, their rejoicing is instantly turned into mourning, and their peace disappears anew.

III.

Therefore, blessed is he, who is able to find the way, from this second period of the inward life, to the third. We called it the period of permanency. Isaiah points it out in the words : "Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads!" Joy is then no longer a timid bird, which in silence takes its flight at the slightest noise ; it then obtains firm footing in our hearts ; for we have made a blissful discovery ; we are then acquainted with only one Star that is never extinguished ; with places that are ever verdant ; with a mirror that never sullies, a robe which moths do not corrupt, and a prospect which is never obscured. And since we know this, we know also how to maintain our footing, and our courage, whatever comes.

A Star that never becomes extinct—do you know this Star ? We ought to be glad to know it, for how many a star we are acquainted with, which though it beam with a friendly light, is soon extinguished, or sinks behind the clouds. The love of God is a sweet and precious star ; how joyfully do we walk in its ravishing beams ! A benignant star is our own fidelity ; and how beneficial is the feeling not to have departed from the Lord and his ways ! A consolatory star beams upon us in the obedience we are enabled to yield him. How cheering, at the close of the day, is the consciousness that we have sought, by Divine grace, to glorify

God according to our ability! A star that shines upon us with particular loveliness in life, is the consciousness of ardent love to Jesus in our hearts. How blissfully do we proceed on our way, as long as this flame burns; but how do we feel, when these consoling stars all at once become extinct, or sink beneath the clouds!—when the love of God no longer reflects itself so brightly in the guidance of our lives—when our fidelity no longer bears us witness that we belong to the Lord, but backslidings and deviations take its place; and when, instead of obedience, from whence we might have inferred the genuineness of our faith—only disobedience and sin as is mostly the case, manifest themselves in our lives; and when the fervour of our hearts is suddenly changed into barrenness, and even into coldness! Yet still, my dear hearers, even then another Star is seen in the sky, which shines down upon us with radiant brightness;—it is the fidelity of our covenant God; the fidelity which is immutable and eternal as his nature, which never forsakes the once adopted child, but goes after it in all its aberrations, and would prefer resolving upon any thing rather than upon leaving unfinished the good work once begun in the soul of the poor sinner. Ah, he who knows how to contemplate this Star in the darkness of his life, is secure from despair. Wherever thou mayest direct thy path, thou wilt take firm steps in the light of this Star.

There is no other staff to support us in our pilgrimage, nor any other rock on which we can lean, than that which is pointed out in the words, "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself." Let every other support fall away; if thou hast found that Star, and walkest in its light, thou wilt never be shaken nor moved any more.

Places that are always verdant—know ye these places? It ought to be of importance to us to know them; we may indeed know many a green spot, but how soon do they fade! The place is verdant, where the Lord sensibly approaches us; but who possesses always this consciousness of the Saviour's presence? The place is verdant, where he pours out upon us the spirit of unction; but who is unacquainted with the hour of barrenness and fearful abandonment? The place is verdant, where striking answers to prayer strengthen our faith; but to whom are the seasons strange when prayer seems presented in vain? Therefore blessed are the sheep who find a pasturage, where the grass never withereth!—and this is found in the promises of the great God and his eternal assurances; these are spots which are ever flourishing and verdant; and are never deficient in delightful food. Though every other pasture may be parched up; yet he who knows how to feed in these meadows, shall have bread and water, peace and joy, in abundance, even in the days of heat, barrenness, and famine.

A seal that can never be obliterated—do you know this impress and this seal? This seal, as the sign of adoption and favour, was formerly discovered in the intense and heartfelt hatred to sin; in a glowing consciousness of love to the Lord; in a lively thirsting after his presence; and in the cheerfulness with which we do his will, and make sacrifices to him. Certainly, all that I have just mentioned may indeed assure us of our state of grace; they are very unequivocal characteristics of those who are no longer of the world, but are drawn to God. He that perceives these features in himself, has read with his own eyes the new name which is given him. But who does not know, that these bold and striking characters may occasionally grow very faint and obscure! yet still there is one remaining, which is sufficient to preserve to us the conviction that we are his children—one, which we formerly little heeded and valued; one, which when every thing else disappears, may still be every moment met with in the centre of our being; and that is, the exclusive direction of the heart and soul to the Lord, the decided will to that which is good, though the performance may sometimes be wanting; it is the sincere delighting, after the inner man, in Jesus and his yoke and service; it is the desiring nothing so much as Him, and Him alone; aye, and though every other trait were to be effaced from the tablet of our hearts, these Divine characters

remain—not indeed always in letters of flame, but still always legible ; we know them, we pay attention to them, and are able to appreciate them ; and thus we possess a permanent document of our adoption, an inwardly flowing fountain of peace and joy in our hearts.

A vesture which moths do not corrupt, nor thieves are able to steal ; and do you ask, “where shall we find such a dress ?” Ah, you are well aware that it is not to be found in your own gifts and abilities ; not in your impulse to pray ; nor in your conviction, your loving feelings, fidelity, and gratitude towards God ; nor in the purity and blamelessness of your walk. All this, though certainly a vesture, and even a beautiful one—one that is acceptable to God, and extremely desirable—yet is it also an uninterruptedly existing and abiding one ? Ah, you experience the reverse ! But the more frequently the latter is the case, the more zealously do you look around you for a vesture which you may have daily and hourly at hand, and at length you find such a one ; you find it in the great living treasury, which is called Christ. It is Christ’s blood and righteousness. Then let every vestment of our own disappear, let the crown of our own personal beauty fall from our heads ; yet we are never naked : the merits of the Surety stand in our inventory ; his righteousness is amongst our clothing, and his merits never fall from us in our

course, nor does any dust defile this robe of salvation.

A prospect that never grows dim.—There are many pleasing prospects ; but it often happens, that before we are aware, night has veiled them from our view, and they perhaps never present themselves again. Such is the prospect of complete holiness of life—the prospect of a pleasing inheritance here below, or a peaceful existence—the prospect of the conversion of some particular friend—the prospect that the beloved of our hearts may not depart from our side—or whatever prospect it may be. Alas ! when so many cheering prospects close, whither shall we direct our eye ? Then lift it upwards, and look towards the place which is prepared for us beyond the stars ; then cast it inwards into that golden hereafter, and the mansions which already bear our names—this prospect cannot grow dim, nor be obscured. It is true our stumblings are clouds ; our unfaithfulness and our aberrations are clouds ; but we know that they are not such as can obscure that prospect. If we belong to Christ—that prospect remains eternally bright, and eternally open to us.

We know the omnipotent “I will” of the eternal Son—“I will that they whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am.” With these mighty words we sweep heaven of its clouds, and dispel the mists. O sweet though distant view ! O blissful look into

boundlessness !” Then let every other prospect be closed ; this one, above the reach of every other earthly power, recompenses for all.

Now see, my brethren, this is the star that is never extinguished ; these are the places which are ever verdant ; this is the seal which is never obliterated ; this is the vesture which the moth does not consume ; and this the prospect which never fades away. We become acquainted with them in the third period of the Christian course, and are then secured from despondency. Permanent joy, if not always in the same measure and degree, is upon our heads.

IV.

However, there is still a more blissful state than the one above described, and the prophet points it out in our text. In the third period, the Christian certainly rejoices ; but we forcibly cause ourselves this joy, so to speak, by the consideration of some particular points, and the preserving it is also accompanied with some trouble. But there is still a fourth, in which we are differently situated with respect to joy. The latter is, then, by no means a constrained guest, who is with difficulty detained. We then continue passive, and obtain joy and gladness, as the prophet says. We are now more accustomed to forget our own persons ; and, in our own ideas, no longer separate them from Christ. We are more exercised in the blissful art, of know-

ing ourselves no longer after the flesh, but regard ourselves in the garment presented to us by our Surety. The manner of viewing the subject, by means of which we are every moment conscious of being blameless in Christ,—aye, and of being an object of the Divine good pleasure, is become more easy to us; and we have gained breath and strength to the fulfilment of that most glorious and greatest of all evangelical commands, “Be ye perfect!” We then no longer constrain joy to favour us with a visit; but joy urges itself upon us. Joy and gladness then become like two powers, which, as it were, are always lying in wait for us; they conceal themselves, I might almost say, behind every bush and thicket; and, before we are aware, dart out and overpower us. Whether we direct our looks upwards to the stars—those lamps in our paternal mansion; or to the blooming scene which Nature presents around us—this faintly reflected image of that beauteous paradise to which we are proceeding; or to the majestic flashing of the thunder-clouds on which He rides, whom we, notwithstanding his exalted dignity, are permitted to greet with an “Abba Father!”—or if we direct to them our exit from this world, which cannot be any thing else than an entrance into the festive halls of heaven—blissful delight continually pervades and thrills through us; joy and gladness meet us on our way, and seize upon us.

V.

However, as long as we sojourn on this side the grave, it is seldom that unmingled joy is our lot. Pain walks hand in hand with it in most cases ; and if we rejoice, we do so on a field of battle, and in the midst of a vale of tears. We are saved indeed ; but it is by hope ; hence we wait with an ardent longing for our entrance upon the highest stage of Christian life, upon the period of eternal fruition. We therefore cast our anchor upon the coasts of heaven, and live upon the pinions of a cheerful confidence, more in the future than in the variously troubled present state. O happy period, when the little tenement which oppresses us falls to ruin, and when we joyfully lay down the dusty clothes of our pilgrimage and our wanderer's staff, and our warlike attire at the throne of the Lamb ! Incomparable moment, when we exchange the crown of thorns for the crown of eternal life, and learn to sing in realms above, the great and everlasting Hallelujah to the sound of golden harps ! Then it is, as saith the prophet, that sorrow and sighing flee away ; no melancholy tear any longer trembles in our eye, which glistens with delight. We then behold Him, who is our love, as well as our hope, face to face, and are like unto him. His peace dwells in our breasts, and the last remains of our earthly suffering has for ever perished beneath the waves of that peace.

See, my dear friends, these are the stations on the wondrous paths which Christ has trodden and prepared for his people. Enter upon them, ye redeemed of the Lord; return with exultation to Zion; let everlasting joy be upon your heads; obtain joy and gladness; and at length, may that happy land unite us all together, where sorrow and sighing flee away, and the mighty song resounds, "To the Lamb that was slain, be praise, and thanksgiving, and worship, and honour, and glory to all eternity!" Amen.

STEPHEN.

Acts vii. 55—60.

But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God; and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord. And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit! And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge! And when he said this, he fell asleep.

STEPHEN is the name of the man around whom we this day assemble. When his parents called their beloved infant thus, and said—doubtless with joyful and hopeful hearts—"The boy shall be called Stephen"—they knew not what they did; and that which they predicted in the name of the boy was hidden from their eyes. But God, in whose book all his days were written, from the first to the last, knew well what would at length become of him,

and it was he who secretly suggested this name to them; for it was a significant name: Stephen means a crown. The boy was to be the first witness in the new kingdom, about whose temples the martyr's blood-stained wreath should be wound. What the name predicted, we see this day fulfilled. A great and sacred scene presents itself to our view. Let us approach nearer, and contemplate, to the praise of Almighty grace, and, with the help of God, to the strengthening of our faith, the end of the first evangelical martyr.

We direct our attention to,—

- I. The cause for which he dies;
- II. The Divine aid which he experiences; and,
- III. The state of mind in which he leaves this world.

I.

We are in the city of Jerusalem. We meet in the streets a number of learned Jews in animated and hot discussion—a select company—all of them men of note from the most celebrated schools of the Libertines, Cyrenians, and Alexandrians,—men who unite a classical education with their Judaism, and are well versed in the wisdom of Greece and Rome. And in the midst of them stands a young man, of a lively and cheerful aspect, and a firm and calm deportment, against whom they all seem to have conspired. It is Stephen, one of the seven

deacons, who after solemn prayer, had been chosen a short time before to that office by the little church of Jesus, for the daily distribution of alms, and who, probably from being a fisherman himself, had been taken in the Gospel-net. Unlearned, untaught, and without worldly accomplishments, but a man of good report, as the Scriptures testify ; full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, faith, and power—and the latter is of greater importance than the former ;—a man who had already unfurled a bold banner, valiantly contended for the honour of his crucified King in many a combat, and was known far and wide in the land by miracles and mighty deeds ;—such is the individual who is assailed by these learned men, well equipped with every weapon with which wit, learning and eloquence can furnish them, in order to overthrow Jesus, the Man of his heart, in his esteem, and eject Him from the fortress of his faith. But, however heated the logicians become, the simple messenger of the cross is not afraid of these armed men ; the weapons of his warfare are not carnal. His dignified opponents can obtain no advantage over the spirit from which he speaks. The power of truth evinced in his words, condemns their lying arts, and confounds their devices. The cobwebs of their fallacious arguments and subtleties fall in tatters at their feet. And oh, the mortifying circumstance ! they are compelled, whilst red with shame and confusion,

to strike their sails before the plain and artless wisdom of this Nazarene.

But even as the enemies of truth are wont to act in such defeats—who must always have the last word whatever happens, and, when wisdom is at an end, give vent to their evil passions; and, if arguments are wanting, uproariously demonstrate the point by the fist and the pummel of the sword—so it is likewise in the present case. These learned men and doctors of the law, furious at seeing themselves so shamefully and unwontedly driven from the field, hastily separate with looks of rage; stir up the people, together with the elders and the scribes; then return triumphing with an armed mob, attack the sectarian, and drag him by violence and with rage before the Sanhedrim.

There, before the assembled council, a couple of hired villains are suborned to appear against Stephen with a number of false accusations. “And all that sat in the council looked steadfastly at him.” But what did they see? “Beloved,” writes St. John, “if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.” The holy calm of his righteous soul reflected itself like solar radiance in his features; and his countenance was like that of an angel, bright, venerable, and heavenly. “Are these things so?” inquired the high priest in a furious tone, completely enraged at the equanimity of the accused. Stephen then opened his mouth;

and with a collectedness, as though he were unconscious of being in such a den of lions, he begins to narrate something to the venerable assembly.

At the rather lengthy discourse which now follows, many a reader has shaken his head: nor can I deny having done so likewise. One would have thought that, in the last moments of his life, the messenger of God would have been able to say something more powerful and energetic than this. A wo upon the generation of vipers, and a thunder from Mount Ebal against the wicked and adulterous race; and then a joyful and valiant confession that Jesus was Lord to the glory of the Father:—something of this kind would have appeared more heroic and more in its place on such an occasion. But instead of that, we have a sober statement of facts which are known to every one, the intention or use of which is not apparent—a dry and uninteresting harangue! Such it appears; and it is difficult to recognize in it the man “full of wisdom, spirit, and power.” But only look a little deeper. What, this a dull and insipid address! There are nothing but drawn daggers beneath it! It is the most striking, pungent, and irresistible call to repentance that perhaps ever issued from the mouth of man. Certainly an excellent archer! Arrow fast follows arrow; and how he hits the mark, both to the right and left!

Stephen is accused of a fourfold blasphemy.

They accuse him of blaspheming God and Moses, the law and the holy place. Stephen, instead of justifying himself, throws back the entire accusation on the head of his accusers, and shows that *they* are worthy of death. Admirable is the manner in which he puts them to shame. The Holy Spirit is a powerful combatant. Stephen relates their history to them. To this they willingly listen, and at first suspect nothing evil. But before they are aware, they have swallowed goads and nails by so doing; and the little book which was sweet in the mouth proves bitter in the belly. Stephen begins with Abraham, and shows them from the commencement, how the existence of the whole Israelitish nation is rooted in the free mercy of God, who, from mere grace, was gracious to the Patriarch; snatched him from the midst of heathen darkness; bore him on eagles' wings to the promised land; gave him the covenant of circumcision; and, at a time when Abraham possessed neither a child nor an inheritance in the land, promised him, according to the good pleasure of his free grace, the whole country, together with a numerous and blessed posterity.

Stephen then notices the sons of Jacob, the patriarchs of the people. But wherewith does he begin the history of these patriarchs? With a piece of wickedness. They envied their brother Joseph, and sold him into Egypt; "but God was

with him." A famine arose in the land, and great affliction. The patriarchs had deserved, on account of their impious deed, to have died of hunger. But the unsearchable mercy of God had otherwise determined. They were received by Joseph their brother; thus experiencing grace instead of justice. "Joseph sent and called his father to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls."

Under the gracious protection of the Most High, who was not forgetful of the promise which he had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and increased in Egypt. Another king arose, who knew not Joseph. He dealt harshly with the people, and ruled Israel with a rod of iron: and they deserved it. But Jehovah did not regard their unworthiness; they experienced grace instead of justice. Moses was born, exposed, wonderfully preserved, and chosen to be the ruler, judge, and deliverer of his people. But how did the latter act? Even as they had always resisted the Lord, in spite of all the manifestations of his grace, so now they resist his ambassador. "They refused him," relates Stephen, and said, "Who made thee a ruler and a judge?" Moses was obliged to flee; but Eternal compassion did not forsake the people. The angel of the Lord appeared to his servant in the burning bush: "I have seen the affliction of my people, and am come down to deliver them!" This Moses, adds Stephen, whom they refused,

saying, "Who made thee a ruler and a judge?" the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer. This Moses, continues he, who brought them out with signs and wonders; this Moses, who said to the children of Israel, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me, him shall ye serve; this Moses, who was with the angel in the desert, which spake to him in Mount Sinai, who received the lively oracles to give unto us; this Moses—oh! shameful and insane behaviour!—our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, made a golden calf, and sacrificed to the idol." The tabernacle of witness was in the wilderness, and God was in the tabernacle. But did they give heed to it? "Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made, to worship them; and I will carry you away beyond Babylon."

Nevertheless, God continued gracious. Israel entered the promised land. The Lord cast out the heathen before the face of the fathers. The tabernacle was continued in Judah until the times of David. David found favour with God, and entreated it as a favour—for as to *right*, that was out of the question—that he might find a habitation for the God of Jacob. Wonderful and unwearied

mercy! The Lord heard, and Solomon built him a house. . . .

Thus far had Stephen related the history; but he was now at liberty to close. It was enough; the proof was irrefutably adduced, that they—they themselves—were the blasphemers; and that they, from ancient times, had been the despisers of God, of Moses, of the law, and the holy place. The conclusion was easily drawn: if from time immemorial ye have resisted the visitation of grace, and trodden under foot God and his messengers, where is the wonder that ye have now rejected and murdered the Son of Eternal Love himself? Ye are the people, from whom nothing better is expected, and in whom such abominations are not regarded as strange.

The assembly is in great perplexity. They feel that what is said applies to them; they are convicted and vanquished. They are forced to condemn themselves against their will. They are enraged to the highest degree; but what does it avail? They must yield. Truth is too strong for them. Their own history testifies against them. Who can refute it? Stephen perceives what is passing in his honourable auditory. He reads the result of his sermon in their faces. The deer is hit. The tree is tottering. The axe must now be laid at its root. The young hero draws his sword, rushes in upon them, hews about him with all its

edge, in order to cause the total overthrow of their self-righteousness: and hence he exclaims, in a manner enough to make their ears tingle: "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted! And they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, but have not kept it."

Thus spake the man of God, undaunted, and full of holy zeal, in the midst of the noble and the mighty in Israel, its rulers and representatives. Dreadful is the accusation brought against the chosen people! Terrible the testimony against the children of the family! Such an alarm had never yet been sounded in the synagogue; such a storm had never before assailed them. It was unexampled and unheard of. Even the Master of Nazareth had stood more reverentially before the high Sanhedrim, than this his scholar, and had refrained from pronouncing any judgment upon them. But the Master was the Lamb, which was, *of necessity*, dumb before its shearers; for he bare our iniquities. Hence he refrained from using the sword; but placed it in the hands of his disciple, and selected Stephen to be the herald, who, in his stead, should proclaim to Israel their guilt from the house-tops;

tear away the covering from their mountains of sins ; condemn the whole nation and its rulers ; and thus justify the inflictions of the Divine indignation, which were, in a short time, to crush the peculiar people, and whirl them asunder, that the promise of Abraham might come upon the heathen.

We know what the discourse of the valiant witness effected. It necessarily brought the minds of his audience to a decision, either one way or other. A call to repentance of such an especial kind—a sentence upon the sinner from the tribunal of his own history—never fails of its effect. Let me only come out against thee, my friend, armed with thy own history, and prove to thee, step by step, and irrefutably, how God called to thee on one occasion, and thou turnedst thy back upon him ; how grace was near thee on another, and thou choosedst the curse ; how thou at one time didst hear a knocking at thy door, but turnedst a deaf ear to it ; how at another a light from God flashed through thy soul, but thou clavest firmly to thy darkness ; how thou wast in one place allured by the goodness of God to repentance, but didst harden thine heart ; and how, in another, that appalling word ‘Eternity,’ awoke thee, and yet thou *wouldst* continue to sleep, and wilfully remain in thy carnal security. Let me have the power thus to assault thee on every side with thine own history, as with a battering-ram, and to support my address

by the blood-red chart of thy life, and thou wilt most assuredly succumb. I have the iron upon the anvil: it will be formed into one shape or other; it will either bend or break. Either thou wilt condemn thyself, and become spiritually bankrupt, and weep; or thou wilt harden thyself, and overcome the power of truth with thy evil will. Either thou wilt cast down thine eyes, and wring thy hands; or, with an embittered spirit, and gnashing of teeth, thou wilt resort to hell for weapons, and with Satanic powers repulse the attack upon thine heart; and thus thou wilt be approaching one step nearer to maturity in wickedness and to judicial hardness.

It was in this latter manner that the words of Stephen wrought upon the minds of the Sanhedrim. Rage ensued instead of repentance; foaming at the mouth instead of tears; hardness instead of humiliation. The labour had not been in vain. Vessels were formed by it—but vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction. “When they heard these things,” it is said, “they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.” And God only knows what would be the consequence, even amongst us; my friends, were I now to begin and unfold before your eyes the registers of your life; or even to place before one or other of you the catalogue of guilt, which he has added during the last ecclesiastical year, with impious hands, to those decisions which lie ready, like so many sen-

tences of death, to be pronounced against him, and are preserved in the archives of the eternal Judge. I could do so, my friends, and am less a stranger to your history than you suppose. I know the path of one and another, and have cast a look into their most secret department. I know of the powerful admonitions to return which have at various times reached their hearts, and of the flashes of Divine light which have fallen brightly into the sinful darkness of their lives. I know of the sounds of the trumpet which have once and again thundered into their fatal repose—a “Wake up, O man, from thy sleep of sin!” and of the hooks which on various occasions have been cast into the soul. But I also know how they convulsively clung to the devil’s neck on account of them, and forcibly held sin fast to them; how they intentionally fortified themselves in death, and with a false spirit kicked against the pricks, which they were well aware were of God. I know how they armed themselves with mockery and falsehood against the approach of truth, and resisted, with infernal vehemence, the Holy Spirit; how that, against conscience and their better knowledge, they gave their hands anew to the devil, and with the audacity of a Pharaoh, hardened the iron sinew of their necks, and said in their hearts, “Who is the Lord, that we should obey him?” God knows what would be the result were I now to disclose it, individually

and particularly, and to lift the veil. A day such as this demands such an occupation, and it is only fitting that we give an account of our stewardship, and strike the balance.

But there is one thing that restrains me ; one thing binds my tongue ; it is the fear lest my feet should this day become dreadful on the mountains, and my discourse a savour of death unto death. It is the apprehension lest I might awaken fury instead of humiliation, and beat the iron hard instead of rendering it malleable ; and, O horrible thought ! be compelled perhaps to become to my beloved congregation such a messenger as Isaiah once was to Israel, when it was said to him—"Go and make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and convert, and be healed." May the Lord mercifully spare me from such commissions to my dear brethren !

II.

Stephen's fate is decided. His discourse has ruined every thing, and produced a dreadful sensation. How the heathen rage, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed ! The whole assembly is in an uproar. How should it be otherwise ? The Sanhedrim has been insulted, and with it the whole nation. Such

a disgrace and mortification inflicted upon the sacred council of the elders cannot be expiated otherwise than by the blood of the criminal. Ha! what a hissing amongst the viper brood! What a glow of infernal rage and revenge in their minds! How they roll their fiery eyes, the irritated tigers, and horribly and satanically deform their visages! Every feature is a murderous threat—every look a dagger—every word a biting adder. They murmur, gnash with their teeth, clench their fists, and stamp with their feet upon the ground. The pit opens itself, darkness has thrown aside its mask, and the black flag of hell waves openly in the breeze.

Stephen perceives what is approaching; but in the measure in which the powers of hell predominate among his enemies, the power of the Holy Spirit increases in him. God does not forsake his servants, nor suffer them to be confounded before their adversaries. As often as Satan arms his host it is also the time for equipment in the kingdom of God; and when the weapons of darkness spring forth from their scabbards, those of light glitter whetted against them. Through the clouds of oppression and persecution, the Lord imperceptibly pours down his dew and his sacred fire upon his people, so that they flourish like blossoming trees in a thunder-shower; and the more furiously the battle rages, the brighter does he polish their armour and their helmets, that they may glitter and

shine, and all the world see that the Lord is in the battle. The Lord is then wont occasionally to uncover the star of nobility, which his elect wear concealed under their vesture. He then places them in the midst of the cloud, "fair as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners," and sets his servants as it were in array for his honour's sake, glorious and resplendent like the angels of God, to the confusion of Satan and in defiance of his foes.

Look at Stephen ; like an osprey, which is at home on the watery element and in the storm ; or the albatross, which, when all is calm, solitarily sinks his plumage, but flies to meet the storm with a cry of joy, and never more cheerfully claps his wings than when beneath him the breakers foam, and the howling hurricanes rush fiercely through each other : so Stephen stands, upheld and sustained by the Lord. The world has cast him out, and rages around him like an ocean to swallow him up. The prospect is horrible beneath and all round him, and there is no way of escape. But upwards the path is clear. Blissful privilege of the children of God, to be able to escape from the pressure of the present state, even through the clouds ! His spirit soars on high, under the powerful impetus of faith, away from the tumult. He lays hold on the hope held out to him in Christ Jesus, "which we have as an anchor to the soul, sure and steadfast ;" and he throws out his anchor above him, within the veil.

Thus the dear disciple lies at a good anchorage, however the depths may roar around his little bark. He is like a pilgrim on the lofty Alps, standing above the storm, whilst thunder and lightning rage beneath his feet.

And now, whilst looking up on high, through the windows of the council-chamber, after the world and its most venerable tribunal have condemned him, in order to deposit his cause entirely in the hands of his heavenly Advocate, oh what a wonder occurs! Dare he trust his own eyes? He, the meanest among the servants of his King, and yet favoured with such a manifestation?—The clouds divide, heaven opens, and he beholds the glory of God—God himself, in that radiant glory in which he appears in the third heaven to the just made perfect and the holy angels. He sees the Ancient of Days, as Daniel saw him, on his fiery throne, and as afterwards the eagle-eyed John beheld him in the midst of the four-and-twenty elders and the seven spirits of God. And on the right hand of the Most Excellent Glory!—O ravishing sight!—he perceives the Man of his heart—Him in whose cause his blood is now to be spilt, after He had first shed His for him. And it is no dreaming vision which he sees—no phantom of the brain—no lying illusion. Stephen is awake; he is sober; he knows where he is; and the circumstances in which he is placed are not exactly adapted to afford room for

the play of fantastic reveries. What he beholds is real and substantial. It is Jesus in bodily form ; it is the figure of Him who is the chief among ten thousand ; it is His glorified body, the most glorious and beautiful of all created things ; it is His incomparable and lovely countenance.

And in what position does the ravished disciple behold him ? Not sitting at the right hand of Majesty. He is standing, as if on the point of hastening towards him with his aid. He is standing, as if thereby He meant to say to him—"Be of good cheer, my son ! Here is thy shield and the sword of thy victory." He is standing, as if calling out to him—"Tremble not, neither despond ; I am waiting for thee with open arms." How happy is the highly-favoured disciple ! The bliss is almost too great—how shall he support it ! Every thing within him exclaims—"My Lord and my God !" "Hail, Saviour, in thy glorious exaltation—a thousand times, hail !" And tears of joy probably streamed from his glistening eyes. Had his triumphal wreath and crown of glory been shown him in the clouds above ; had the prospect been unfolded to him of the golden streets in the eternal city, and the palm-groves of paradise ; had he been given to hear from afar the high praises of angels on their golden harps, and the hallelujahs of the just made perfect—oh, this would also have been lovely and an encouragement in the conflict ! But what would

it have been, compared with such a sight—compared with the manifestation of the fairest upon earth, or in heaven itself? It is not that which we possess through Jesus, but Jesus himself, which constitutes the heaven of his children. He is the banner under which we fight, and the prize for which we strive. He is the magnet whose attraction draws us, and the fountain after whose waters we thirst. He is our glory and our crown; he is our home and our couch of repose; the end and aim of all our longing and desire, our joy and perfect satisfaction; He, the Saviour himself, is our all. What the house is to the sparrow, the nest to the swallow, water to the fish, light and warmth to the flower, Jesus is to us—our element and our life; the possession of Him is the summit of our happiness—the beholding Him, the supreme delight of our eyes—and resting on His bosom, the heaven of heavens.

O how sweet and strong is the union of affection between Jesus and his sheep; how incomparable, and above all comprehension and expression! One of his little ones is in danger; a reason sufficient for the Divine Friend immediately to rend the heavens, and personally to appear to him in the clouds. And nothing more is necessary than the mere manifestation of himself to his oppressed follower, and the last remains of fear vanish from his breast, and he treads on the necks of his enemies. Like the lark, which, intoxicated with the

odours of spring, and melted into love and joy, exultingly soars aloft into the calm, pure air; so Stephen's soul hovers above in the light of the countenance of his Jesus: and that which otherwise distressed him—affliction, shame, death, and the terrors of the grave—all is now overcome, abundantly, suddenly, in a moment, in a look.

Yes, in one look! Oh that you all were acquainted with this mystery! Believe it, my dear friends, as often as you see us sorrowful and oppressed; and if we are so occasionally, it is only a sign that we are not in our element; our station is no longer beneath the cross, and a mist hangs before the eyes of our faith. Let the fog only subside, and the sun again break through the clouds, that the image of my Divine friend may again portray and transfigure itself in me, and let me again lay hold of and embrace Him—I am then a hero, and ascend on wings as an eagle; then death no more affrights me, nor sin any longer troubles me; I then laugh Satan to scorn, and clap my hands at the hosts of hell, and even when in difficulties, ye shall see my countenance shine as on a nuptial festival. The sight of Jesus is my triumph and my strength; the sight of Jesus is health to the sick, and victory to the dying; the sight of Jesus is my source of sanctification and my armour for the fight; yea, that which causes me to run in the way of his commandments, and smile in the furnace of

affliction, is the clear view, by faith, of the sun of my life, of my Jesus!

Stephen cannot contain himself. He must make known what he sees. There the holy hero stands, with nothing but the expression of serenity and victorious joy in his countenance; and in the midst of the disturbance of his raging foes, he extends his arm towards heaven, and loudly and exultingly exclaims, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God!"

On hearing this, their rage rose to its height; and the last barriers, which had restrained the complete breaking forth of their fury, completely gave way at these words. They began to cry out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, ran upon him with one accord, and dragged him tumultuously out of the city, in order to stone him.

Oh, he who knows the human heart—that unfathomable, deceitful, and desperate thing—will not be surprised at this result! He perceives how it is, that the bold testimony of the blessed disciple caused such an impression; how the sacred collectedness of the accused man, and his sublime and Divine serenity, only excited the rage of his adversaries to the utmost. Alas! it was natural, very natural, that this decided, calm, yet mighty triumph of the Nazarene, should vex and excite them most deeply; and this unexampled heroism, which

he derived from the hated Jesus, be to them a thorn in the flesh, an abomination, a savour of death unto death. The exhibition of this confounded their accusations much too decisively; his angelic countenance, in the midst of their curses, condemned them more powerfully than even his words; and from the discourse and deportment of the man an odour of truth reached them, against which their deceit was scarcely able to stand; and it contained an argument in favour of Christianity, which really threatened to convince them, in the centre of their hearts, that they were in arms against the cause of the living God, and laying murderous hands upon a messenger of Jehovah. The voice of truth spoke strongly at that moment—very strongly. The wretches were not far from the kingdom of God. Had they only now given ear to the secret voice, which testified so powerfully in their hearts for Stephen, and against them; for the truth and against their devilishness and lies; but, alas! alas! they would not have the truth, but lies; and the more mightily and victoriously truth assailed them, the more powerfully did they harden their hearts, and the more impetuously do they present their breast against it. They stifle the reproofing voice in their souls; they stop their ears to the accusations of conscience; and, instead of humiliation, the most horrible exasperation ensues, and a fury which

proceeds from the lowest hell. O dangerous state! to be not far from the kingdom of God, and yet to be equally as near to judicial hardness and hell!

III.

We have left the council-chamber, and are outside the city walls. What a tumult! What rage and fury! The execution takes place. O, dreadful! dreadful! The witnesses who, according to the law, were to cast the first stones, lay down their garments, as the sacred historian informs us, at the feet of a young man named Saul, and he took pleasure in his death! Good God! and yet this Saul became a Paul! O free, unfathomable, omnipotent grace!

The witnesses take up stones; Stephen sees it; but his countenance continues firm and cheerful. He knows in whom he believes, and whither he is going. Do not expect, my friends, that the Almighty will now stretch forth his strong arm from the clouds, and dash the tools of Satan to pieces with his thunders. No; Stephen must fall. The Lord requires people for the martyrs' crowns which angels weave above, and the blood of the martyrs enriches the soil of the church. Stephen is also well satisfied with it: he longs to be at home. The storm breaks upon him; the stones fly; his head already bleeds. He then joyfully opens his mouth, as if he were pelted with roses,

and exultingly exclaims, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" Lord Jesus! Lord Jesus! Thou precious war-cry of God's children—the watchword by which we recognize each other—the trumpet's blast at which the walls of Jericho fall down! That which the ringing of the alarum-bell is to the inhabitants, when fire is in the city—the signal-gun in the field at the approach of the enemy—all this and much more are the words "Lord Jesus!" to the church of God—they are never silent in it. It is the cry with which the babe is born in the Lord, and with which the aged pilgrim leaves the world—in which all their sighs are clothed, and all their longing vents itself. Lord Jesus! 'Thou precious watchword! O, if we had not thee, we should be the most miserable of all creatures! Wherewith should we adjure the storm? Wherewith should we tranquillize the poor disturbed heart? Wherewith should we face the devil and sin, and soar aloft above the storms of the present state? We have our sword, our staff, and every thing together, in the words "Lord Jesus!"

"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" With these words he commits his soul into the hands of his King. O, refuge in every age! O, secure resort! O, sweet resting-place! It is not dreadful to fall into these priestly hands, and happy is he who offers up himself upon this altar! Many a one becomes conscious, only in the last moments of his life, that

he has a soul which cannot go the same way with the flesh. Whither shall he go with it? back into the world? The gates to it are closed. Into the hands of the devil? That would be dreadful. Into the Almighty's hands? He is a consuming fire. To the Lord Jesus? He does not believe in him. Horrible dilemma! But Stephen is at no loss. He has way and space enough. He sinks upon the bosom of his Mediator, exclaiming, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" We hear nothing of a—"Be not dreadful to me!"—"Impute not my sins unto me!"—"Be my advocate in judgment!" All this had preceded. There is no longer any mountain in the way; no whirlpool causes him trouble, no rock obstructs his passage home. Every thing is removed out of the way; he is able to steer a direct course, as upon a smooth and level mirror, into his desired haven, and cast his soul into the hands of God without further ceremony. Stephen dies by no means like one who at the last moment is plucked like a brand from the burning, and at his last breath, environed by his sins, surrenders at discretion, and then with his eyes bound, not knowing what land his vessel will make, passes over, half hoping, half despairing, into eternity, as into an unknown country. Stephen dies like one who has already felt the hands into which he commits himself rest with blessing on his head, and who has long before received from them the wedding gar-

ment in which he is able to stand before God, and confidently feels whither he is going. Such is indeed a happy death. And, after embracing the horns of the altar, and casting his soul into the pierced hands of his King, he sinks down into the dust, streaming with blood and with broken limbs; and upon his knees, and with folded hands, he once more opens his mouth, the dear hero, for the last time in this world, and exclaims with a loud voice—You already know, my brethren, what was his exclamation: if you did not, who would have guessed it? If Stephen had broken out into accusations and execrations against the infernal brood; had he thundered upon them an anathema-marana-tha; who would have been particularly surprised? We should have found it pardonable, and perhaps in order; for it would have been human and natural. But here is something more than human; here is a ray of that nature which is not of the blood of man, but of God. Stephen presses in spirit his murderers to his breaking heart, and lifting them up in the arms of love before the throne of grace, he exclaims with a fervour as if it were for his own soul—"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!" Even as his Lord and God on the cross, when in one breath he spoiled one of Satan's fairest triumphs, and, with a "Father, forgive them," victoriously and instantaneously deprived him of the whole troop of his most devoted slaves; so here

the disciple, in whom we behold the glory of the Lord reflecting itself, as the sun in the dew-drop of the morning. It was no mere showy imitation of his great Master, no ostentatious or theatrical deception ; it was truth—the man's profoundest feeling—his inmost intention and sentiment—a consequence of thorough self-condemnation, and of the blissful humiliating consciousness of the unmerited mercy which he had obtained. Whilst regarding himself, in a lively feeling, as the unworthiest of sinners, revenge no longer found a place in his contrite mind, and he was compelled to give way to compassionating love and pity. The blood of the Lamb, which had washed him from his sins, flowed now through his veins as the sap of the vine. Divested of his own burden, he had time and heartfelt compassion enough to bear the burden of his enemies' sins before God, as if it had been his own, and to entreat for them his eternal mercy: "Lord," cries he, "lay not this sin to their charge!" or, according to the original, "Do not establish it against them—let it not remain!" O what a dreadful judgment did he avert by this intercession for his murderers! When God establishes a man's sins against him, there is nothing more horrible that the individual can experience. No washing nor purifying then any longer avails ; sin remains firm and indelible, like a mark that is branded. No anxious perspiration erases it, nor any flood of tears

washes it away. It maintains its seat like some cancer which no herb can cure ; and for it there is no more sacrifice, but a fearful looking-for of judgment and of fiery indignation, that shall devour the adversaries. Horrifying wo ! Stephen had reason to fear that such a judgment would fall upon his murderers. He knew to what an extent God loved the sheep of his Son, and how he was wont to recompense them that dared to touch those whom he calls the apple of his eye. But his whole soul trembled at the thought, that his enemies, whom he really could not regard as worse than he had found himself to be in his own nature, should incur any thing of the kind on his account, and because of the wrong they were doing him. He opposes himself to it with all his might ; stands, as it were, in the breach for them ; and restrains the lifted rod of the Almighty Avenger. " Lord, lay not this sin to their charge !" He prayed thus from the Holy Spirit, who is a Spirit of love and compassion ; and God, who is one with the Spirit, and knows the mind of the Spirit, did not close his ear to such a request. The prayer at least produced *one* fruit, which refreshes us even to the present day. If Stephen had not prayed, we say, with St. Augustine, the church would have had no Paul.

It was almost with his last breath that the beloved martyr, opposing his bosom to the judgments of God, offered up this prayer of interceding love ;

for, when he had thus spoken, the sacred narrative informs us, "he fell asleep"—as it were with an olive leaf in his mouth. How wonderful is the language of the Bible! Only think—the death Stephen died is called falling asleep! A death of the most dreadful kind that can be imagined; a death in the bloom of his years; a death whilst in perfect bodily health; a death in convulsions and nameless pangs, amidst a shower of stones from infuriated foes, and, as it were, on the scaffold and gallows of shame; and this is called "a falling asleep!" How little truth does there seem to be in such an expression! But though this *seems* to be the case, it is in reality otherwise. The language of this world is dipped in falsehood; that of the Bible is true and purified like gold. The former, as the mirror of the thoughts of fallen man, speaks only according to appearances; but the language of Scripture is the language of the Spirit, who searches into the essence of things. This Spirit saw, in the death of Stephen, something more than the horrifying exterior. His look penetrated into the interior of the departing spirit. He saw the wondrous light from God, which irradiated this soul; and the boldness of the conscience purified in the blood of the Lamb; and the sacred sabbatism of the mind in the enjoyment of the fruits of the cross; and the blissful home-ache of the breaking heart; and the peaceful willingness with which

the soul, longing after the liberty of the just made perfect, suffered the dissolution of the bands of the body, and clapped its wings to meet the morning of an eternal day. He saw it ; and to call it dying was then out of the question. It was a going home—a falling asleep in the arms of Eternal Love.

There his body now lies crushed, bathed in its blood, and covered with stones upon the field—himself a polished stone and well chiselled piece of workmanship in the foundation-wall of the Apostolic church—a grain of wheat that was to fall into the ground and die, that it might not abide alone, but bring forth much fruit. But this bleeding corpse is not Stephen, it is only his travelling dress—Stephen has shaken off the dust of this earth from his feet. The moment of his falling asleep was that of his eternal awaking. Lift up your heads and look upwards. There the young hero stands, elevated above all night, shone upon by the same light, in which, with longing ecstacy, he had seen the glorified form of his King from the hall of the Sanhedrim. The beatified disciple now stands before Him, and sees Him eye to eye, and sees nothing but Him, and desires to see nothing but Him alone, and is satisfied in this one look. The angels of peace approach with cordial salutations, and bring with them the white robe and the triumphal palm, and the conqueror's wreath wherewith to adorn him. And Stephen, with downcast look, receives the

wreath and cast sit at the feet of his Bridegroom, exclaiming, "Thou art worthy!" and embraces his knees, and is silent, and adores, and knows not how he feels, nor where he shall find words, until a Seraph reaches him the golden harp. The first hallelujah of his blissful and ravished heart then resounds with its notes, and mingles with the songs of the thousand times ten thousand, "Honour, and praise, and glory, and immortality unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever."

This now is the narrative, my brethren, which brings before our view the fairest of what may be found under heaven, at least in some of its radiations. It unveils to us the hidden glory of a regenerate soul, the new creature born of water and the Spirit, than which there is nothing on earth more beautiful. This sacred deposit generally continues more or less hidden during the present life, like the tabernacle in its mean covering. In the case of Stephen it was, for once, partially developed before the world, that admiring it might behold what grace can effect, and be conscious of the gulf which is fixed between the work of nature and that of the Eternal Spirit. And this gulf is boundless! All the glitter and ostentation of national virtue—what is it, compared with the vivid brightness of the new life, which, like liquid silver in the smelting house, shines towards us from the

whole appearance of this man of God? He leaves father and mother, in order, thenceforward, to devote himself with body and soul to the service of the truth, with which he has become acquainted in Christ. Resigning property and life in the confession of this truth, is a trifle to him. Impelled by the love of Christ, he esteems every thing the world calls precious as a loss, that he may make the brethren partakers of the salvation he has obtained. With a dauntlessness which does not tremble even at torture and death, he erects the standard of the cross in the midst of a hostile people. With a faith which has overcome the world, he carries it into the assembly of the Sanhedrim; is reviled, and reviles not again; is cursed, and blesses; is furiously assaulted, his soul takes refuge above the clouds; hell rages, he sees heaven open; he is fallen upon with murderous intentions, his countenance shines like that of an angel; they overpower him, he raises his arm towards heaven from the midst of the hostile swarm, and exclaims, like one of the blest, "I behold my King!" he is dragged forth to the slaughter, and is quiet as a lamb; a shower of stones hurls him to the ground, but he conquers in succumbing, cheerfully commends his spirit into the hands of Jesus, bends his knee in the dust, prays, whilst swimming in his blood, fervently and with a

full heart, for his murderers, and then passes over, triumphantly, into eternal light.

O say, what becomes of the most sublime of that which nature ever produced in its own strength, in the light of such a brilliant life of grace? However, it is not the man who is glorified here, nor is it human art or education which here celebrates its triumph. It is grace—omnipotent, wondrous grace. To it be the glory ascribed!

Even as the Bible is a book of Divine sketches and ground-plans, indicating the line of conduct which the Lord has resolved to observe, even to the end, both in his kingdom in general, and towards individuals in particular—so the narrative in which we have been expatiating is more than a mere historical event, and a terminated fact. It is, at the same time, like all the narratives of the gospel, typical—an actual promise for the whole church; an event full of the most sublime and universal meaning; a Divine seal, which, expressed in definite features, portrays to our view the glorious protection of grace; which is, in its essence, in reserve for every believer in seasons of distress, and particularly for confessors and warriors under the banner of the cross. The Church has had more than one Stephen, and more than once have the words, “I see the heavens opened,” been uttered under the axe of the executioner, and amid the flames of the scaffold; and as soon as his church

shall be again oppressed upon earth—and it will be the case in due time—our narrative will be reiterated a thousand different ways, and manifest itself in living instances. Certainly I know not whether any of us will be favoured in the same manner, here below, with the sight of the throne of his King and the man of his heart, as Stephen beheld him with his bodily eyes. But what need is there of it ? Blessed be God, who, besides bodily eyes, has also given us other eyes ! If these be clear and bright, the outward heaven may remain closed against us, yet these eyes penetrate through the thickest clouds, and with this sight, we daily and hourly see into the reality of that which Stephen was favoured with beholding with his bodily eyes. O how happy we may esteem ourselves on account of the blessed spectacle which presents itself to the view of our faith beneath the fogs of this vale of tears ! Let the storms blow and the waves roar ; let the thunder-clouds discharge themselves, and Satan, death, and hell march against us ; we behold other things than these ; we lift up our heads on high, and boldly stretch out our hands out of the midst of the tumult ; and our watchword, which elevates us above the darkness and causes us to triumph in the midst of conflict, is, “I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.” Amen.

SOLOMON AND THE SHULAMITE.

SOLOMON'S SONG III. 1—4.

By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth : I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city ; in the streets, and in the broad ways, I will seek him whom my soul loveth ; I sought him, but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me : to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth ? It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth : I held him and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.

THE Bride, the Church of the Lord, or the individual believing Soul, opens to us in the text the treasury of her spiritual experience, and displays to us glimpses of her inward conflicts, to which some amongst us will, doubtless, find a key in their own Christian experience. O how deep and important the truth unfolded to our view in the narration of the Bride ! That which binds us to Christ should not only be the sweet savour of his benefits, but, moreover, the painful sense of our poverty and misery. May our meditations this day lead us to a deeper insight into the meaning of this great truth. With con-

tinual reference to ourselves, let us consider the Bride in the fourfold state in which she appears to us in the text.

- I. How she revels in spiritual abundance.
- II. How she loseth what she had, and languishes in banishment.
- III. How she is engaged in a fruitless search.
- IV. How she findeth, never to lose again.

I.

“By night on my bed I sought him.” Sought whom? “Him whom my soul loveth—Christ, the fairest of the sons of men; Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom.” Him the complaining soul had had upon her couch. Delightful figure, by which the entire blessedness of her former state is indicated! She had had the Lord upon her couch. To have the Lord upon our couch, what else can it mean, than to dwell with him and in him, to have the most lively consciousness of his blissful presence, to enjoy his favour, to be filled with the most devout and ardent feelings of love and tenderness towards him, and with the purest joy and delight in the contemplation of his person, his acts and words! To have the Lord upon our couch, what is it, but to possess the assurance of his attachment and love, and an inward joyful conviction of our interest in his promises and declarations; to be animated with devout emotions, and with lively

impulse to praise and magnify him, to rejoice, and to exult in him.

Let us look back upon the declarations of the Bride in the former verses of her song. When she exultingly declared, "The savour of thy ointments is delightful; thy name is as ointment poured forth." When she exclaims, "My beloved is to me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of En-gedi. Behold thou art fair, my love; behold thou art fair. As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love. Stay me with thy flagons, comfort me with apples; for I am sick of love. My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies." As she thus sang and rejoiced, and when there was melody in her heart, then she had him whom her soul loved, upon her couch.

This sweet and delightful state, in which we may be said to have the Lord upon our couch, is generally experienced in the early period of conversion. Under the almighty influence of the Spirit of God, the delusions that had obscured the barrenness of our heart and life, gradually melt away like snow. It rends the veil of self-deception; and, before we are aware, our entire destitution of peace and joy is presented to our view,

though we had till then deemed ourselves full, and in need of nothing. We feel voids that must be filled up, and spiritual wants that must be satisfied. We find it is not with us as it should be, and we become deeply impressed with the necessity of a change. Words and actions, sentiments and pursuits, which have hitherto appeared correct and good, begin to disturb us; and we feel an inward gnawing, like the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched. Then we run to and fro to seek a cure, and how we may still the raging thirst of the soul. But this world is not Gilead; and its reliefs, counsels, and consolations are broken cisterns, that can hold no water. The stronger this feeling becomes, the greater our depression and grief, till at length there is an end of all joy, the sluices of sorrow are opened, and laughing is turned into bitter weeping. The Spirit breathes upon the soul; the icy bands of natural pride and impenitence begin to fall asunder, and the sinner beholds his misery, divested of every covering. Where now shall he look for help? Behold even here the work of grace; a Hand in the cloud which guides securely, and never leads astray. He comes to Jesus, sighs and implores for mercy: and having received an answer in his soul, that sweet season commences, when, like the Bride, he has the Lord upon his couch. How delightful his sensations! What a life compared with the poor miserable ex-

istence afforded by the world ! Let us call to mind our own experience, when our spiritual affections possessed their early freshness. We could then, like children, shed tears of joyful emotion, as often as we perused the Scriptures, or reflected on the faithfulness of the Lord, on his word and history. How great was then our joy, when we heard his name preached, and his people bear testimony to his faithfulness ! With what ardour we were filled when his praises were sung ; with what fervour we prayed, with what necessity, with what desire and love ! How strongly were we then incited to speak of him, and thought to convert the world at once, and to proclaim his name from the house tops, and in the streets ! Then we gloried in difficulties, that we might overcome them in the strength of the Lord ; and we sought for living stones, wherewith speedily to erect a temple to our God. How incomprehensible it appeared to us, that other Christians were so still, so calm and composed ; that they did not participate in the fulness of our joy, or join in our triumphal song ; that they even uttered sighs and complaints, while we imagined that with sighing and complaining we had for ever done ! Do you still recollect this time ? Then, in this sense, in which the Bride in the text meant it, we had the Lord upon our couch.

This state was sweet and blessed ; but the welfare of our souls required that it should not be per-

petual. The Lord in his own time had to lead us forth from this Goshen of spiritual pleasures, from this luxurious pasture of mental enjoyment. For did we not surely begin to be presumptuous, considering ourselves as great saints, and distinguished from others, on account of our blissful serenity of soul? Had we not begun, while rejoicing in our wealth, to be ashamed of the beggar's staff; and had not the sense of need abated, which had compelled us to knock at the door of mercy, and to prostrate ourselves at the rich man's gate, with the poor and destitute? Was it not in reality far more our own piety and fulness of delight, on which we built and rested, and for which we hoped to escape condemnation, than Christ and his merits? Were we not already seeking the foundation of our future bliss *in* ourselves, instead of *without* ourselves, in Christ crucified? And did we not love the bread with which Christ fed us, and the wine which he gave us to drink, much more than himself? We loved and clung to him, it is true—but with what sort of love? Was it the intense, holy, steadfast love, which is grounded on the consciousness that Christ is our Surety, who hath redeemed our souls from hell, and rescued us from consuming fire? Was it a love based on the humiliating thought: I am not worthy that the sun should shine upon me, yet Christ has descended from heaven for my sake, to save my soul from hell, and to purchase it with

his own life ? Was it that attachment and clinging to him which spring from the most lively perception of our entire destitution, nothingness, and impotency, and from the conviction that it is on the grace of Christ alone we exist every moment ? Oh no, so far our glance did not extend, neither into the abyss of our own ruin, nor into the depths of the merits of Christ. We had merely skimmed the pool of our misery, and the unfathomable ocean of the Redeemer's love and mercy. Our love to him could, therefore, be only superficial. Single sins had, indeed, presented themselves to our view, but not yet our entire sinfulness ; this and that transgression, but not the entire desolation and corruption of our heart ; one deformity and another, but not the pernicious sap which pervades us, not the whole image of Belial that we bear within us. In one word : we had adhered to Christ more for the sweet savour of His gifts, than from a sense of our misery, and of His being indispensable to our salvation. This was a lax and weak band, a love which every wind of temptation might destroy—not an ardent glow, strong as death, and unchangeable as hell—which many waters cannot quench.

II.

But that we may attain unto that perfect state, in which we cling to Christ, no longer for the mere pleasure we enjoy in his presence, but because of

the misery we experience in ourselves ; no longer for the apples and flowers with which he has regaled us, but because he is necessary to our eternal salvation ; not for the pleasurable feelings and delightful hours enjoyed in his kingdom, but because apart from him we feel ourselves abandoned to the wrath and fiery indignation of God, and to all the powers of darkness. That our attitude may be that of exclusive dependence upon him ; that we may hang upon his neck and say, "Lord Jesus, do with me what thou wilt, refresh me or not, fill my heart with manna, or let me suffer want—to thee I cling ; for where thou art not, I shall perish in my misery ; for out of thee all is darkness, death, and hell,"—that this may be our state, the Lord generally proceeds with us, as he did with the Bride. In his own time he changes the sunshine in our souls into the gloom of night, and withdraws from us all consolation. "By night upon my couch I sought him whom my soul loveth," says the Bride ; "I sought him but I found him not." It had become night with her, and she was forced to complain, "I have lost the Lord."

It has become night in us, in the sense intended by the Bride, when the consciousness of the blissful presence of the Lord has departed from us, and the soul no longer retains any perception of the felicity enjoyed at his right hand. It is become night when the flow of holy feeling and

emotion is dried up, and our joy in the Lord and all that is his has expired within us. It is night when the word that we read no longer affects us, when its promises leave the soul cold and insensible ; when the sermons we hear afford no enjoyment, and the worship of God, once our most joyous employment, has become a burden ; when we are no longer impelled to pour forth our souls in prayer and praise, and when the most sacred engagements do not cause the heart to overflow with holy joy and delightful emotion. Then it is become night ! O deplorable state ! When the spikenard of our spiritual knowledge has lost its fragrance ; when the grapes on the Gospel-vine yield for us no juice, and the flowers no perfume ; when our hearts are become barren, and our spiritual tongue cleaves to the roof of our mouth. Then we are full of complaint and lamentation ; we are cast down and know neither counsel nor consolation ; for the prop on which we had leaned was not the merit of Christ, but our own feelings ; and this prop is now broken. The foundation, on which the superstructure of our hopes had been erected, was not the beam of the cross, but the loose ground of our own piety and lively sensations ; we had been accustomed to look more to ourselves than to Christ ; our confidence had been our love to the Lord, not his love to us. Therefore a cloud no sooner dims the bright glow of our sensations

and feelings, than we find ourselves deprived of the consolations of Christ, and are forced to complain, with the Bride: We have lost the Lord.

III.

We will now examine what further occurs in this state of destitution and banishment, when the luxuriant spring time of our soul is changed into the chill of winter, and the melody within us has ceased; when the heart, once so animated, sensitive, and happy, has become a barren sand. We see it in the Bride. When it had become night in her, she resolved: "I will arise and seek him whom my soul loveth." "Yes, I will! I will!" By this we perceive how little she knows herself. I will arise, will restore myself, will take possession of the paradise I have lost, and of my former blissful state. I will again warm and animate my heart, will again acquire my former joyfulness and my former delight in prayer and praise. Yes, what is there that she will not do? Well, let her resolve, let her strive. On the path she has entered she will make wonderfully wholesome discoveries. It is a path of sorrow, but its end is joy and peace.

"I will arise." Whither will she go? "I will go about the city, in the streets, and in the broad ways. I will seek him whom my soul loveth." In the city? yes, in the spiritual Jerusalem; in the kingdom of God; in the congregation of the faith-

ful ; there she hopes to regain the exquisite felicity she has lost. But alas ! we hear her complain, "I sought, but found him not." What the Bride here confesses, have we not all experienced ? When that night overshadowed us, we also imagined we could ourselves rekindle joy in the soul, again render our barren hearts fruitful. We also could exclaim : "I will ! I will !" as if all had been within our own grasp. Then we also arose, and went about the streets of Jerusalem ; tried every means, and hoped to force the waters of spiritual consolation again to flow ; but ah ! "I sought, but found him not."

We had recourse to heart-stirring, beautifully spiritual books, which we allowed to preach to us, in the hope thus to obtain relief, and to re-animate our stagnant feelings. But, alas ! the books seemed stale and insipid, and left us as we were, dull and cheerless. We sought, but found not. We hastened to the assemblies of the saints, where the love of Christ was joyfully proclaimed ; where his praises resounded in spiritual songs, and fervent prayers ascended to heaven ; here we expected a joyful spirit would again possess us, that our hearts would melt, and our tongues be loosened. But we sought and found not. While the eloquence of others flowed like living waters, and their prayers were ardent, we were speechless, or uttered empty words ; they spread the wings of devotion, and

soared on high ; we too essayed to rise, but we had no wings to spread. We forced ourselves to sing, but the song died upon our lips, unresponded by our hearts. We sought, but found not. We eagerly thronged to whatever was solemn and sublime, hoping that there our icy hearts would melt again ; and there we should again taste that joy, which is eternal, at the right hand of God. But it was and remained night ; and it seemed as if no spring would succeed the winter in our souls. We sought, but found not. We wearied ourselves in the streets of Jerusalem, and fatigued our friends with our complaints ; we resorted to every expedient to refresh and invigorate our hearts ; but we had still to complain with the Bride : “ I sought, but found him not.” The Bride meets with the watchmen who go about the city. The watchmen—who are they ? We, the ambassadors for Christ, whose business it is to go about Jerusalem ; to watch for the safety of the city ; to arouse those found slumbering in burning houses, and on the edge of precipices ; to conduct those walking in their sleep from the dangerous rocks on which they climb ; to warn those who stray from the path of life, and comfort those who sit solitary and weep ; to encourage those who lie breathless in the streets, unable to proceed. Yes, the watchmen are the Stewards over God’s mysteries. To them the Bride came, and addressed the inquiry : “ Saw ye him

whom my soul loveth?" Amongst them she expected certainly to find what she sought; but even this last hope deceived her. Here too she was constrained to exclaim: "I sought, but found him not." Exhortation, counsel, and instruction enough; but no life, no joy, no interest in the Lord and his cause, nothing of that which she desired. She had now wearied herself in the streets of Jerusalem, had tried every thing; but still she remains, and complains, "I sought, but found him not."

IV.

It would now seem as if the Bride were for ever cut off from all salvation; and yet her salvation was never so near as at this moment. She had now reached the point of connection and union with Christ, which is eternal. She had made great efforts to rekindle her love for Christ, his kingdom, and his cause, but all in vain; and even amongst the watchmen who go about the city, she had not recovered what she had lost. Lifeless as she had come to them, had she again departed. And as she proceeded a little onward, there—Well, what happened there? There, methinks she first paused, communicating with her disconsolate heart, and felt, for the first time in her life, with the full clearness and force of truth, the worthlessness of man and all his acts, and that sin hath sunk him into the most abject helplessness. Nay, that so deplorable

is his state, and he is so inwardly dead, that, of himself, he is incapable of gratitude towards the greatest of all benefactors, the most faithful of all friends; that he cannot even open his mouth in praise and thankfulness to him, who, beyond all in heaven and on earth, is worthy to receive glory and honour, thanksgiving and praise; that of himself he is unable to rejoice in the greatest blessings, or elevate his heart in prayer to God; that he cannot excite in himself any desire after the Lord and his benefits; and that even the best adapted means are insufficient to dissolve his rocky heart in devotion, love, and holy joy. This she had never dreamt! Indeed how could it have occurred to her, that human nature was so debased? But now experience had opened her eyes to behold, for the first time, its complete corruption; to perceive, that the natural life was in reality death, and not life; now for the first time she felt how deep her fall, how weak and barren her life and will, how great her ruin, and need of help. Hitherto she had desired from her Bridegroom nothing but kindness, pleasure and refreshment: now she requires a surety to appear for her, a mediator to undertake for her, an intercessor to plead for her before the judgment seat, a renovator to mould her into something on which the eye of God might rest with delight. All this she found in him, who had till now been nothing more to her than a beloved friend, that had cheered

her life and rejoiced her heart; but now how infinitely precious had he become. When she had passed on a little, she exclaims, "I found him whom my soul loveth!"

Was it not the same with us? At first we, too, attached ourselves to the Lord, more for the delight we had in him and in his words, than because without him we felt ourselves to be eternally lost. But this was a slender attachment, a feeble love; transient as the pleasurable emotions which called them forth. When they vanished, and the table at which we had been regaled was removed, then, alas! we fell away from Christ, and could deny him ten times in a breath, and in various ways. But when enlightened by the Spirit, we knew ourselves as lost, as ruined creatures, and were enabled to discover in Christ a Saviour, whose hand alone could snatch us from eternal flames, our attachment to and our connection with him assumed a new and very different character.

I hold him, the Bride joyfully exclaims, and will not let him go. And why will she not let him go? Because he fills her heart with joy, and is the source of many delights. The Bride, if in our midst, would reply: "Though he left me to languish, and suffered me not to taste of his loveliness, I hold him, and will not let him go, because I know that he alone can save me from eternal death. "I hold him, and will not let him go." Why not? Because he

sweetens her life, and richly provides for all her necessities? Oh no, oh no, she would reply; though he gave me gall to drink in this life, I know that he alone can conduct me safely through the gloomy portals of eternity, and the fiery scrutiny of the last judgment: therefore I hold him, and will not let him go. "I hold him, and will not let him go." And why not? Because he can help her to attain that righteousness which is approved before God. Help, the Bride would exclaim: I cannot furnish any thing to adorn myself for the great wedding! He must, and he alone can, clothe me in the garments of salvation, in which to appear before God. Therefore I hold him, and will not let him go, but surrender myself entirely into his hands. "I hold him, and will not let him go," she exultingly exclaims—or rather the Spirit within her—"till I have brought him into my mother's house." What are we, then, to understand by her mother's house? Paul says, (Gal. iv. 26,) "But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all." There she will bring her Surety, and there be brought by him. Now, beloved, we behold a soul by the grace and guidance of the Lord, united to Christ; not as formerly, by a sense of the abundance of joy which is derived from him, but by a feeling of its poverty and great misery; not by the experience, "It is good to be here," but by the thorough conviction that without him hell, death,

and ruin are its portion. It recognises in him now not merely a Comforter, but a Saviour ; and, conscious of its own frailty, it no longer hopes for eternal life as the reward of love to the Lord, or leans on its pious emotions : but it rests exclusively on the merits of Christ ; and it can say with Asaph, in Psalm lxxiii., “ Whom have I in heaven but Thee ? and there is none upon the earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth ; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.” May the Lord thus guide us, one and all ; and may the consciousness of our worthlessness form the chain which binds us to him ; and his merit and love to sinners be the rock on which our peace is founded.

SERMON II.

SOLOMON'S SONG II. 14.

O my dove, thou art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.

WHOSE voice is it that we have just heard? It is the voice of the fairest of the children of men; the heavenly Bridegroom speaks to Shulamite, his dearly purchased church—or to individual souls affianced and wedded to Him in faith. Sweeter than milk and honey are the words which flow from his lips; and when the Bride afterwards so joyously exclaims, “Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue;” she does so, undoubtedly, in the blissful recollection of this address of her Bridegroom, and of the soul-refreshing words: “My dove in the clefts of the rocks, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.”

We will now consider the words more closely: and may the Lord abundantly refresh us from this fountain of living waters!

I. Let us contemplate the dove in the clefts of the rocks.

II. Then, consider what the Bridegroom intends by his address to her; "Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice."

I.

"My dove."—Thus the Lord addresses the elect. He calls them frequently by this tender epithet. In the fifth chapter he says, "Open to me, my sister, my dove:" and in another place, "My dove, my undefiled, is but one." But why are they addressed as doves? Is it on account of the splendid plumage, the righteousness of Christ, in which they are arrayed? As it is said, Psalm lxviii., "Though ye have lain among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers as yellow as gold." Or is it because of the gentle spirit of Jesus which is in them, and which once displayed itself visibly under the form of a dove? Or are they called doves, because they rise above the world; as Moses declares; "and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath?" Doubtless all this appertains to the character. But if we take a deeper and more enlarged view of the figure, we shall find points of resemblance, between a soul converted to the Lord, and a dove, more numerous, and perhaps more attractive and striking.

If the lamb be excepted, there is no creature more defenceless than the dove. She has neither tooth nor claw, neither hoof nor sting, only a pair of wings for flight ; in flight lies her entire strength and triumph. Thus, we confess it, whether it be to our honour or shame, thus it is with us, whom grace has transformed into the doves of Christ. Those who are out of Christ, are all stronger. What heroes do we not find amongst them ! who think themselves equal to every encounter ; who know nothing of fear and caution ; whom no enemy can make tremble, no danger appals ; and who would disdain to look for help in circumstances ever so perilous. They think to vanquish empires by the strength of their arm ; to seize the promises as a prey ; with the right hand of their own righteousness to stop the lion's mouth ; to extinguish the fires of the last judgment with self-acquired virtues ; and to escape the edge of the sword by their own wisdom and dexterity. Of all this, like dreamers, they think themselves capable, through the power of their own might. Yea, what cowardly fugitives are we, when contrasted with those giants in virtue, who think to scatter their enemies like chaff ; that sin, the world, and the devil, with every other bitter foe, shall fall before them ; whilst we prepare for instant flight, if we but hear the distant roar of the approaching lion. We venture on no contest alone ; but as soon as the trumpet of

conflict sounds, seek protection behind the shield of our champion. They display a more heroic spirit ; and, proudly scorning all support, rush, as if invulnerable, into the hottest fire of temptation ; and, though vanquished, exult in the glory of falling on the scene of conflict, the field of honour. Such honour we disclaim. We are not such Anakim, such giants and lions. St. Paul, indeed, speaks of breastplates and armour ; of the helmet, the shield, and the sword, with which we are equipped ; and, judging from this description, we might be taken for wonderful heroes. But such is not his meaning. As a dove escaped from the hawk, and safe in the shelter of her covert, may be said to be armed against her foe, and to be covered with helmet and shield ; in the same sense are we renowned in many parts of Scripture as formidable, as cased in armour, and terrible as an army. But, like the dove, our entire strength and invincibility consists in flight, and in taking refuge ; for we are defenceless in and by ourselves, and it has happened to us as it once happened to Saul—the Philistines have stripped us of our armour, and have deposited it in the house of Ashtaroth. Do Satanic temptations assail us ? We hasten to Him who will be our house and our refuge, and there we are found secure. Do we hear the devil roar ? We venture not to encounter him, well knowing it would be rushing immediately into his jaws. We

cling to the Saviour, and a wall of fire compasses us around. If the lusts of the flesh revive and stir within us—unlike those who strive to conquer them by firm resolves, and other self-devised expedients—we quickly fly to Him who is our shield. And scarcely have we beheld his bleeding wounds, scarcely stammered forth a single “Lord Jesus,” when the victory is ours; while they, with all their panoply of self-will and self-exertion, sink deep into the mire. This is our method, and it is that of the dove. We by no means enter into any conflict; we seek our salvation solely in flight. Jesus is our armour: the shield that protects us; the helmet that screens us; the sword that defends, and the fortress that encircles us.

Doves, it is well known, love their accustomed dwelling-place. And would we ascertain whether we belong to the spiritual swarm of doves, we must minutely examine how we feel in the world, whether pleasure or pain; for by this we may know it. If we are the doves of Christ, born of him, we feel pain, anxiety, and fear, wherever he is not; and as this must ever be the case, it is impossible to experience the delights and comforts of home in worldly society, or in worldly pursuits; on the contrary, we are uneasy and straightened, the heart is oppressed, and lifts its wings to seek a purer atmosphere. As a child among strangers is alarmed, and ceases not to inquire for its mother; and as the soul

of an exile swells with inexpressible longings after the land which gave him birth ; so feel the doves of Christ in the air of this world. Nay, in it they cannot live, nor endure to the end ; they must continually ask for their mother, and are nowhere so happy as in the air which encircles the mountains of Jerusalem. "In the world ye shall have tribulation," says Christ ; this is one of the most infallible marks of a state of grace.

Whilst we are speaking of doves, some one amongst you may perhaps be reminded of the ancient well known, and so called carrier-pigeon, and inquire whether there are no points of resemblance between spiritual doves, and them ? Undoubtedly there are. They both are able to return to their homes, wherever placed. They have a free passage ; and are ever willing to carry with them the burdens and messages of strangers.

When the fiery serpents came upon idolatrous Israel, the people themselves venture not before the Lord with their complaints, but applied to Moses to intercede for them ; and he flew up to the house of the Lord, and poured the distress of Israel into the ears of an all merciful God ; thus Moses became the carrier dove of his people. So David flew for Solomon, Lot for Soar, Daniel for Jerusalem, and Job for his children—ascended on the wings of prayer, and brought the suit of those for whom they went forth before the Father's throne. And

when Jeroboam besought the man of God to pray that his withered hand might be restored ; and Darius entreated the Jews to pray for the King's life ; and Simon requested the Apostles to pray, that none of the things which he had threatened might come upon him ;—then the man of God, the Jews, and the Apostles were employed as carrier-doves, to bring the affairs of those, who have themselves no wings, into the Father's house. O all ye winged souls, who know the way above, and have free ingress and egress through the blood of Christ ; disdain not ye likewise, to be the flying post between heaven and earth, and willing interposers between your brethren, who have as yet neither wings nor voice, and between God. Carry not only your own burdens before the throne of grace, but likewise those of strangers. To be a dove of Christ ; to have unrestrained access to Him, as to our house ; to receive from his hand daily and hourly supplies of grace and mercy, and to drink of the pure fountains of Israel—truly this is a happy state ! O that God would form all our souls in this dove-like manner, to this dove-like state.

But to return to our text. “My dove,” says the Lord. Where is this dove now to be found ? where is her place ? Ezekiel once speaks of doves of the mountains, all of them mourning for their iniquity. Shall we meet our dove there ? No ; once, it is true, she may have had her seat amongst

them, mourning and sighing with them, in ashes ; but now she has soared upwards from this gloomy region and vale of tears, and dwells elsewhere. Isaiah beholds from a great distance a whole swarm of doves flying as a cloud. Is ours perhaps amongst them ? No, our dove has already reached the windows, towards which they are only flying. Noah's first dove, as you know, fluttered restlessly over the surface of the waters, and found no resting place. So flutter many. Does our dove resemble Noah's ? Not at all : our dove has found rest for the sole of her foot, and the olive-tree on whose crown to alight. She is in the clefts of the rock. "My dove is in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs," says the Lord. Now behold this weak and defenceless bird, seated proudly and securely in her rock, like a king in his castle, or a chieftain in his camp, bidding defiance to the whole world. No fowler can reach, no hawk penetrate her dwelling ; no serpent cast its venom so high ; and though the beasts of prey that roam the valley, howl amongst themselves, the dove in her fortress can laugh, and look calmly down upon the tumult. Clouds roll their thunders over them ; but she has no fear. Lightnings flash fiercely around ; but the rock is not melted in this fire. Mountains sink before the storm, and mighty forests are laid waste ; but the foundations of her house stand fast.

The dove then dwells in the clefts of the rocks.

If we now abandon the figure, and judge the subject spiritually, the rock will be Christ, the rock of salvation, and the clefts his bleeding wounds, in which rests, like a dove, every believing and accepted soul. Of a truth it has found a safe retreat. Not so you, who are firmly nested in the dry brambles of your own righteousness. Behold the branches will be burned in the fire of the judgment, and oh! the poor bird with them. Not ye, who depend upon your own piety, and expect salvation from it. Oh! believe it, that in the day of judgment this will be counted as stubble, which is cast into the oven, but not as a ground of your redemption. But our dove has found a Zoar, not in herself; for there she could only discover what merited condemnation; nor in her own works and feelings; of these she could only exclaim, Unclean! unclean! She was not so foolish as to dream of gathering grapes on the shores of the Dead Sea. She found her rest, and the certainty of her salvation and future bliss, not in herself, but in the wounds of Christ, in his bleeding merits and atoning death. Her mind was so staid and governed that she knew herself just before God, not on account of the new life that had sprung up within her, but only on account of the blood-shedding of her Surety. And this is the foundation which is firm and abiding, when every thing else sinks and passes away.

Of him, whose salvation is firmly settled on the perfect satisfaction rendered by his Surety, whose hopes centre in the merits of the true Paschal Lamb, and who esteems himself secure in Christ alone—of him, it may well be said: “Behold a dove in the clefts of a high rock, and in the secret places of the stairs!” No prince was ever so securely intrenched behind his fortifications, his ramparts and walls, as this dove. Moses is a skilful archer, and sends out curses; but here he may leave his skill; no ban can disturb, no curse effect, this dove. For her silence of night reigns on Sinai and Ebal, and the wild flames of fire are quenched in the blood of the Redeemer. The subtilty of Satan is foiled; he may indeed go about the rock, and roar, but he cannot seize the dove, without swallowing the rock itself, in which she dwells. Should even her love decline, and her faith glimmer as an expiring light; should her zeal cool, and her heart become sterile, as a barren sand; yet is she safe, for, God be thanked! her faith, her zeal, her love, are not her resting-place; her strong-hold and her fortress are alone the blessed wounds of Christ. In this frame she is ever fair in the sight of God; and though miserable herself, she shines as a crown of gold in the hand of the Lord. And supposing the Eternal would consume her, as a devouring flame; in this palace she is stronger than the anger of God, and conquers the Eternal in his wrath. I therefore

call upon you all, in the words of Jeremiah, "O ye that dwell in Moab, leave the cities, and dwell in the rock, and be like the dove that maketh her nest in the sides of the hole's mouth."

II.

We have now contemplated the dove in her secure retreat, after she has renounced all self-dependence, and, despairing of herself, has taken shelter in the clefts of the rock, the rock of Christ's merits. Let us now listen to the voice of the Bridegroom. "My dove," he cries, "my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is lovely." What does the Lord mean by this address? how is he to be understood? and what secret motive may have prompted it? To me it appears thus:—

The Lord will see the countenance of his dove and hear her voice, because her voice is sweet, and her countenance is comely. By her countenance is intended the golden plumage, the imputed righteousness of Christ, in which she is adorned; the new life in God, the new creature within her, the man of light for whom the world is become too narrow; the faith with which she is filled, the peace and tranquillity which take possession of the pardoned soul; it is her illumination, her holy

longing and desires, and her inward, constant, spontaneous resistance to all darkness and sin—all these belong to the countenance of the dove. Her voice is the incense of prayer and supplication, of praise and adoration, kindled by the Spirit's sacred fire. This is the voice the Lord wishes to hear, and this is the countenance he desires to behold. Do you wonder that he should desire this? Is it not said (Psalm civ. 31), "The Lord shall rejoice in his works?" He is himself the perfection of beauty, and his pleasure is to behold himself, and all that has proceeded from him. The seraphim around his throne are his delight, because he sees in them, as in a mirror, his own glorious image. But he rejoices still more to view it in the dark ground of the sinner's soul.

The morning stars proclaim his praise, even in their silence; and they display with astonishing lustre the purity of him who made them. But of all his works none so loudly declare his praise, as the work of grace in the sinner's heart. With inexpressible glory his power and love are there exhibited. Imagine, a sinner worthy only of condemnation, becoming at once holy; as David in the same breath declares: I am poor and needy, I am holy, a servant of the wicked one transformed into a dear child of God; a creature of darkness becomes light, like the sun, because its light is come; dead wood begins to put forth and bud; and in

miry clay begins to be formed the image of the Godhead. What a manifestation of the glory of the Lord! How grand, how amazing an exhibition of the glory of his name, of his infinite power and inscrutable mercy!

And shall the Lord not find pleasure in the work of his hand? He desires to see this work, and rejoice to contemplate himself in it. "Show me thy countenance and let me hear thy voice; for thy voice is sweet, and thy countenance is comely." But why "show me thy countenance?" why "let me hear thy voice?" What does the Bridegroom mean? Is not the Bride always looking towards him? Does she not live and move in him? Does he not behold her every moment? Why then this call to show her countenance? And does he not hear her voice, in the inmost recesses of her soul? This voice is never silent to his ear. This is indeed all true. Yet, sometimes it pleases the Lord to require a more prominent display of what his grace has wrought in the secret sanctuary of the soul: partly, that those in whom his work is carried on may attain to clearer perceptions of it, and be incited to more elevated devotion; partly to furnish a glorious spectacle to angels, and to the world, and to magnify his holy name in their eyes. With this view he leads his people from under the grateful shadow of the palm-trees of Elim, again into the wilderness; and calls them forth from tranquil-

lity and calm contemplation, into the tumult of life, into various perplexities, into night and gloom, where the light which his grace has transfused into them has opportunity to prove its existence, and to shine forth conspicuously. The severe trial which he suspended over Abraham, and the command, "Go, and sacrifice thy son whom thou lovest"—what was it but the same call, though disguised, "My dove, show me thy countenance, and let me hear thy voice?" And, behold, the voice of this dove is sweet, and her countenance comely! The conflict with Jacob—for what purpose did it take place? That it might evince, how powerful the strength of the Lord is in our weakness; and what courage, what invincibility, he can infuse into a dismayed and fearful heart; and the countenance of this dove also was most comely in its appearance. Therefore know, all ye spiritual doves; if Jesus lead you in a similar way, if thick darkness encompass, or the fires of temptation rage around; if he rouse you from your security, and causes Laban to assail you from behind, and Esau from before; he only seeks in this way an opportunity, partly himself, to behold the work of grace within you, and partly to discover it to yourselves and others; and in this gloomy dispensation the call goes forth to you, "My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy counte-

nance, let me hear thy voice ; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.”

What we have now said is true, but whether it be also applicable to our dove in the Canticles, is another question. I believe it is not. In my opinion it is not the intention of the Lord, in this instance, to call forth the soul from her tranquil and contemplative state, and to involve her in perplexities, in order that her graces may appear in a stronger light. No, I think I can perceive a motive yet infinitely more lovely and tender in this call ; “Show me thy countenance, let me hear thy voice.”

The soul whom Jesus here calls his dove, has acquired an insight into herself, and her ruined state—and into the depth of that fearful abyss on the edge of which she had so long unconsciously slumbered ; she has caught a distant glimpse of the judgment-throne, and the Lord, as a consuming fire seated upon it, with her sentence of death upon his lips : then anguish and horror took hold upon her, as an armed man ; then she faltered from place to place to find a refuge, a secure retreat from his vengeance. She sought, but found none ; the billows of anguish mounted high, and rolled tumultuously over her—then the Saviour appeared to her with the cheerful declaration, “I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions, for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.” She no sooner heard these glad tidings, than she rose

and embraced him ; she cast herself upon Him as her only hope ; and in his merits, in his wounds, she found the long-sought refuge and place of rest. Now she is in the clefts of the rock, rejoicing as a brand just plucked from the burning. But her joy is not unmixed, her state of grace not yet perfect ; many things still separate between her and the Lord. Her soul is yet oppressed with difficulties that render it impossible freely to exult in the grace she has received. Sometimes the sense of her unworthiness weighs like a mountain on her heart, and she is ashamed to lift up her eyes ; she cannot conceive, that, for her sake, the Saviour should submit to such labour and trouble. The wounds that constitute her safety become her pain. Sometimes the fear of again falling into sin, and of losing what she has gained, afflicts her ; and she strives with fear and trembling, if by any means she might arm and defend herself from the roaring lion who threatens her destruction. She cannot believe that he who delivered her should still care for her—feeling deeply her unworthiness she considers this would be requiring too much ; it is enough, more than enough, that he so mercifully snatched her from the fire. She is as yet entirely destitute of filial confidence in Jesus ; she lies prostrate at his feet, and would pour forth her gratitude, but the thought obtrudes itself : “ Ah ! what value can the King, surrounded by his seraphim, place on my poor

thanks ?” She would pray, but awe restrains her tongue, and she imagines so much has already been done for her, she ought not to desire more. Such is her state ; great fear yet blended with her joy, great pressure of heart ; her intercourse with the Saviour is not yet that filial, cordial, unrestrained communion, which is so full of great benefits and of rich blessings.

The Lord well saw the state of his poor dove’s heart ; and he saw it partly with delight, and partly with sincere compassion. He approached her, and addressed her tenderly, in order to gain her confidence, “My dove, why art thou cast down ? Art thou apprehensive, that I having extended my arm for thy deliverance, thou hast no farther interest in me, and that my mercy is exhausted ? Thou knowest not how my heart is affected towards thee. I have indeed redeemed thee ; but thinkest thou that it has been like one redeeming a creature of indifference, and then going on his way ? No, I also love thee—thou pleasest me : show me thy countenance—thy countenance is comely unto me, I have pleasure therein : be not silent before me, let me hear thy voice, it is sweet to me ; thou art my delight ; and it is perhaps of higher importance to me, than even to thee, that thou shouldst be kept from the enemy, and that the work begun in thee should be perfected to thy profit, and to my honour and glory.”

And it was not perhaps until the dove comprehended the force of this endearing declaration, that she was able fully to rejoice. Every oppression, every burden was at once removed from her soul. Her heart was now free, her courage glowed, and her relation to Jesus had assumed an entirely new character. It had become a blissful, familiar intercourse of giving and receiving ; of ingenuous, child-like application and desire, and of unceasing supply ; and, in the place of fear and trembling, had succeeded the most joyful assurance ; for she now knew, not only that Christ was hers, but that she was his. What a blissful state ! in which whatever had intervened between us and the life-spring of our spiritual joy, has disappeared ; in which every doubt or difficulty that had prevented an entire surrender and devotion of ourselves to the best of all masters, is abolished ; and in which every impediment to an unrestrained supply of grace from His fulness, is removed. O ye redeemed of the Lord, who have by Divine grace found the only secure hiding place, whose souls have fled to the rock which was founded by God before the foundation of the world ; but who have not, like our dove, attained to a child-like, confidential, and ingenuous intercourse with your Surety ; who have embraced him as a Redeemer, but not yet as a friend, not yet as a brother, and the benignant guide of your life, who is willing to dwell with you under one roof, to

carry you in his bosom, and who entirely *lives* for his own, as once he *died* for them—may you soon obtain from the Lord of lords, in this or in any other manner, the blessed assurance that he is not merely pleasing in your sight, but that you are likewise well pleasing in his ; that your countenance is comely to him, and your voice sweet, much sweeter than ever his voice to you ; that you may not continue oppressed and fearful, and appear as brands scarcely plucked from the burning ; but that you may enjoy the blessed state of the Apostle John, and repose upon his bosom as free and beloved children, in the full experience of what is said by David, (Psalm xxxvi. 7—8,) “How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O, God ! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house, and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.” Amen.

SERMON III.

SOLOMON'S SONG I. 5—6.

I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem ; as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me ; my mother's children were angry with me, they made me the keeper of the vineyards ; but my own vineyard have I not kept.

THE words of the text are those of Shulamite, a redeemed soul ; and they contain a remarkable testimony of herself. She here describes her inward and outward state, in a well conceived picture ; and she gives us at the same time a passing sketch from the history of her inward life. Let me beg your attention, while endeavouring to investigate the import of her words. We will consider :

- I. Shulamite's blackness : " I am black—the sun has looked upon me."
- II. Her comeliness and beauty ; " I am comely as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon." And lastly, reflect upon,
- III. The experience which she mentions : " my mother's children were angry with me ; they made me keeper of the vineyards ; but my own vineyard have I not kept."

I.

“I am black!” Singular confession! The Bride of the Most Lovely, black! In the kingdom of Christ, how counter every thing runs to reason, and our natural conceptions! For example: one would imagine the natural order to be, first holiness, and then pardon. But the law of this kingdom reverses the matter, and declares, pardon first, and then sanctification. Reason thinks virtue to be the way to peace; but the Divine rule makes peace with God precede, and virtue follow as the fruit of peace, and not peace as the fruit of virtue. Human wisdom supposes a man must become upright before he can attain the rights of citizenship in the kingdom of heaven; but the wisdom of God appoints the kingdom to sinners, and numbers integrity of life amongst the things to be enjoyed within its boundaries—not without them. Reason cannot think otherwise, than that a child of God must be pure and immaculate; and behold, here steps forth such a child of God, a soul entirely devoted to the Lord, and declares without the smallest reserve: “I am black, O ye daughters of Jerusalem.” Black, both inwardly and outwardly. Whence then thy blackness, thou fairest among women? “The sun has looked upon me.” The sun! what sun? Surely not the Sun of righteousness, that bringeth healing in his wings, and is the

fountain of all light ? Yes, the very same. In his vicinity, in the blaze of his light, the Shulamite has become black.

Whence does she come, the heavenly dove ? Can it be from the world ? has she there soiled her plumage ? or from the paths of sin, or the fires of temptation ? By no means ; she is come straightway from the King's chamber ; where she has rejoiced in him, and refreshed herself with the fulness of his grace. And she no sooner leaves this place, than she discovers that she is black. Whence then her blackness ? She is black from the rays of that Sun, in whose beams she had been reposing ; for her king—even Christ, with whom she had been—he is the sun. We are all by nature black ; to the very core, the complexion of our heart, our life and being, is black. But who is sensible of this ? We perceive not our blackness and sinfulness, until exposed to the radiance of the Eternal Sun ; until the effulgent glory of God's presence renders our darkness apparent, and the light of his Spirit penetrating the gloom, discovers to us the dark abyss of our nature ; then we exclaim : "I am black, O ye daughters of Jerusalem ; the sun has looked upon me." How was it with Isaiah, when he found himself suddenly near this sun, and saw the Lord sitting upon his exalted throne ? He was all at once so black, and found himself so unholy and so

miserable, that he began to tremble at himself, and before God, and anxiously exclaimed, "Wo is me ! I am undone ; because I am a man of unclean lips." What happened to Simon Peter, when he became aware that the Day Spring from on high was with him in his boat ? As if struck by lightning, he fell at Jesus' feet, saying : " Depart from me ; for I am a sinful man, O Lord !"—that is, in other words, "I am black, O ye daughters of Jerusalem ; the sun has looked upon me." And when the Lord looked up at the publican Zaccheus in the sycamore tree, what was the first impression which this look produced ? The publican became a sinner, became black in his own eyes, black as an Ethiopian, and began to make confession : "If I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I return him fourfold." Thus it is still : when the Lord condescends to draw near to us, the first effect of his presence is, that all our imagined lustre is dispelled like the mist, and our darkness becomes palpable. The sun makes us black. When the Lord rends the heavens, and comes down to commune with a child of man, and to establish his covenant with him, the immediate effect is, that he feels himself black, and knows his misery. And be assured that he who has not experienced the searching power of that Sun, has never yet come in contact with the Sun itself ; he is still

without ; not even having taken the preliminary steps towards the ratification of the covenant.

“ I am black,” says the Bride. From whence does this confession proceed ? Is it the excessive fervour of a first repentance, as a newly awakened sinner ? By no means. It issues from her secret intercourse with the Lord, from a state of grace, and from the chamber of her King ; as one of the redeemed, as a member of the kingdom. And she is still black ? Yes : that appears strange to many. But it is not strange to him who has been planted in the same soil with the Bride, and who has been led in the same way of salvation ; he knows well the impossibility of living in the communion of the great Sun of Righteousness, without daily discovering in himself, by means of the bright rays, new and deeper shades of darkness ; that, by means of communion with Christ, one becomes daily blacker, and the state of the soul, as it is by nature, appears worse every day. Those who so easily and rapidly pass over into a state of glorying, on account of their progress in holiness, cause us at least to suspect that they do not sufficiently walk in the light of Jacob, nor hold close communion with the Lord himself. It arises from the nature of the intercourse itself, and is confirmed by the experience of all the saints, that the more unreserved our confidence is in the Lord, and the closer our intercourse with Him, the more comprehensive will be

our perception of the depth of our own ruin. Every fresh insight into the glory of Immanuel becomes a torch, to display, in a clearer light the greatness of our depravity. Every new discovery of the purity of his nature and his will, strengthens the consciousness of our own impurity. Every new communication of his grace will be a coal of fire upon our head, and will deepen and quicken the feeling of our own unworthiness; and every new experience of his love and faithfulness will make us more painfully sensible of the absence of those qualities in ourselves, and of the coldness of our hearts. Thus, in the light of his countenance, we shall daily discover deformities and stains, which we have hitherto overlooked; daily find occasions to humble ourselves at his feet, and devoutly to rejoice that our wedding garment has long been woven and finished for us; and that the blood and righteousness of Christ are abundantly sufficient to cover us before the judgment-seat of God. Yes, only be and walk with Christ, and have fellowship with Him, and I will warrant you that to the end of your days the Shulamite's confession will be yours, "I am black, O ye daughters of Jerusalem; the sun has looked upon me."

"I am black." Black is the Shulamite in her own, and black in the eyes of the world. "Look not upon me, because I am black." Her Sun has deprived her of her natural complexion, and has

made her dark. What does the regenerated soul still continue to bear about her of all the world calls beautiful and delightful? It has all faded like grass in the heat of the Sun that shone upon her. She is no longer seen in the assemblies of her former associates; she has forsaken the counsels of the children of this world, in which she once so joyfully participated; she no longer relishes their frivolous jests, and can contribute nothing to their diversions. She no longer attaches importance to appearances and dazzling show. Worldly fashions, and worldly conviviality, have lost their charm, and worldly views and opinions their hold and their reality. The doctrine of insufficiency which the Shulamite professes, which strips man of every thing, and renders him destitute; the air of conscious sinfulness she bears about with her; the gravity she maintains; the sharp condemnation of unbelief and disregard of the truth ever on her lips; the eternal singing, praying, and Bible-reading, with which she spends hours, and even days;—oh how odious and disgusting they are to the world, and how liberally derision and abuse are showered down upon her. She is slandered, decried, ridiculed; and with good reason may she exclaim, “I am black, O ye daughters of Jerusalem”—black in the estimation of the world: but she adds, “The Sun has looked upon me”—in this she rejoices, and lets the world rage. And were

she also black through crosses, persecutions, and adversity ; black as Job found himself when he said, " My skin is black upon me ; " even then she would not waver, but would remain unshaken in her confidence that this blackness proceeded likewise from her Bridegroom, from her Sun.

" I am black." * We have already seen the more obvious and general meaning of the Bride, in these words. But perhaps this confession may likewise have its origin in a peculiar state of soul. The Christian experiences, in his communion with the Lord, days and hours in which, so to speak, to all appearance he ceases to be a dark moon, and breaks forth and shines with all the radiance of the rising sun ; in which with holy transport he soars as on the wings of a young eagle, and would even seek for the highest walls, in order to leap over them with his God. O happy state ! How gladly would he then see himself surrounded by Antichrist, and all the powers of darkness, that he might testify, to their face, of Christ, and of the efficacy of His blood, and with him trample them under his feet ; how joyfully would he then proclaim aloud from the house-tops, and in the streets, that Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father ! How sweetly the heart is then invigorated to the fulfilment of every command ! With what intense love, with what ardent devotion, the soul is then inflamed ! Faith is changed into sight ; we not merely speak,

but we prophesy and sing psalms ; and the mouth becomes an inexhaustible spring of evangelical wisdom and consolation. We are ready to say with David, " Lord, thou hast made my mountain to stand fast ; I shall never be moved ; " and we already triumphantly exclaim, " The eternal hills are our possession." But in the midst of all this exultation, our glory becomes suddenly obscured. The daughter of Zion, that had been exalted to heaven, is cast down to the earth again, and her lustre has passed away like a shadow. No sensible supplies of grace are experienced, no blissful emotions are felt, no alacrity of spirit elevates the soul. Prophesying has come to an end ; our praises are languid ; the law causes us again to labour and to be heavy laden : and, like a tree deprived of its leaves in autumn, all the splendour in which we had for a time been arrayed, to the joy and astonishment of our acquaintance has been stripped off, and not a vestige of its beauty remains. Then, again, we are black ; and the daughters of Zion behold it, and compare our present blackness and dimness with our former state and life. Those who are but partially enlightened, who are not yet able to estimate these dealings of the Lord, will view it as a melancholy relapse into our former state of nature—as a sudden separation from the Lord, and from his love. But Shulamite may say to them with confidence, ' Look not upon me, because I am black : the Sun has

looked upon me. Do not judge me by the present darkness of my appearance ; be not deceived by the sudden barrenness, stupidity, and exhaustion, which have come upon me ; as though they were a sign that the union between me and my Sun had been dissolved. It is not the absence of the Sun, but his nearness and the fervidness of his beams, that has tinged me with so dark a shade, and rendered me so sterile and devoid of brightness. My Bridegroom has himself withdrawn from me that excess of spiritual excitement in which I revelled, that I might not be highminded, but fear ; that I might not forget my former state of sin and misery, and might learn to trust Him for his word alone, without seeing or tasting : therefore look not upon me, because I am black ; and do not start and be confounded : believe me the Sun has looked upon me, and our union is as firm as ever.'

There is one other way in which the Lord sometimes makes his people black. To promote their salvation, and their humility, he suffers the leprosy of sin, still lurking in their breast, to break forth and to display itself outwardly, that they may not remain ignorant of its existence. On this point much might be said ; but as there may be some amongst you who cannot yet bear it, and who might be led by it into lamentable errors, we will pass it over in silence, and turn from the contemplation of the Shulamite's blackness, to admire her comeliness.

II.

“I am black,” says the Bride, “but comely.” Black and comely at the same time? How contradictory! And yet the Shulamite may say with truth, The blacker I am in my own eyes, the fairer I am before Him. His love to us is in proportion to our self-knowledge, and to the consciousness of our sinfulness. Do we seriously complain to him of the burden of one sin, he welcomes our approach. Do we sigh before him, confessing that our transgressions are more in number than the sands upon the sea-shore, he views us with increased satisfaction. But do we reject all that we have and are, as vile and accursed, and appear before him stripped of all self-righteousness, then we are most pleasing in his sight. There is but one complaint he cannot bear—the complaint, that our sins are too great to be forgiven—for that is the suggestion of Satan, who seeks to close against us the fountain of Christ’s blood, and to derogate from its merits. He delights in the pardon of aggravated sins, and finds most pleasure in the cure of the severest wounds, and in the removal of the greatest afflictions; for thus his love and mercy are more conspicuously manifested, and the renewed soul becomes more closely, gratefully, and devotedly united to him. If the cry ascend to him, from a thorough conviction of our misery, that we are nothing, and can do nothing: oh, how willingly does he

hear it! His hands are then unbound, the work is his alone—he has room to display his wonders, and opportunity to show who he is, and of what he is capable. For this reason, the blacker we are in our estimation, the fairer we are before Him.

“I am black, but comely.” In what sense, then, is she comely? Comely and beautiful, as the curtains of Solomon. Solomon’s curtains may have been costly and magnificent; but there is one curtain that surpasses every other in splendour and beauty. It was not fashioned by the hand of man, nor can it be imitated by man. It is the work of the Eternal King, who wrought it with many cries and tears. This curtain is the only one that is pure in the sight of Him before whom the heavens are not clean, and who chargeth his angels with folly. In it he perceives no stain; and so wonderful is its efficacy, that if it were possible for Satan to wrap himself in it, even his blackness would be concealed from the searching eye of Omnipotence. It was in this covering that David, Mary Magdalene, the thief, and every other sinner, received the blessing of the Father, and have been raised above the stars in the firmament. And Abraham pleased God, for no other reason than because he was clothed with this golden mantle. What is this wonderful covering? It is the robe of salvation—the righteousness of our Surety, which is imputed to faith by grace. For if we are in Christ, sin has no more

dominion over us, as the Spirit testifies. We are accounted as righteous before God, for Jesus' sake, as fully as though we really were so, because he was so for us—the curse and condemnation are removed, for they have been sustained by us in the person of our Surety and Substitute. And this garment of imputed righteousness is not circumscribed, nor inadequate to cover all our sins; neither is it of so thin and loose a texture, as not to conceal from the glance of the Almighty every stain and spot upon us. Praise and thanks to God! This garment will suffice in the day of judgment, and will as surely bring us to Jerusalem, as if Solomon himself were entering the city in it. Put on, then, this garment, and the blessing of the Father will descend upon you; and it shall be said of you, also, “Cursed is he that curseth thee! Blessed is he that blesseth thee!” Yes, the Shulamite is fair and comely—comely as the curtains of Solomon. She is arrayed in the golden vestments of the king himself—in Solomon's princely apparel, in his robe of righteousness.

But within also, the king's daughter, as David says, is all glorious, notwithstanding her blackness; and she is not only comely, as the curtains of Solomon, but also as she herself here tells us, as the tents of Kedar. The Kedarites were a pastoral people, living in the deserts of Arabia; and having no abiding place, they roved from pasture to pas-

ture. They dwelt in light huts, or tents, some of which were made of black goat-skins, and others were made black by the scorching heat of the sun. Such are the Kedarites to whom the Shulamite compares herself. In the first place, because of her blackness ; then, with reference to her position in the rays of the majestic Sun, and to her walk in the light of Jacob, and in the sight of the Lord. But by it her thoughts are chiefly directed to the idea of "Christ in us ;" whilst, in the curtains of Solomon, her eye contemplates, moreover, "Christ for us."

Shulamite, a Kedar-tent, black in herself, worthless and unsightly, and burnt by the sun—deformed in her own eyes, in those of the world, and beset with misery ; but fair, and lovely, and highly exalted—the dwelling of the great Shepherd, the glorious Morning Star, to which he has free ingress and egress—the place of his rest, the theatre of his miracles, where all his wonderful works are made manifest. Christ has taken possession of her, and extends that possession continually. The new man within her also sighs, longs, and struggles upwards—having fallen out with sin, and hating and abhorring it in every form—weeping and mourning over the weakness and corruption of the flesh, feeling himself forlorn, a stranger in the world, and finding no pleasure in its ways ; but loving, praising, singing, and praying—behold this is the work of the

Lord, fashioned in his own likeness, and without weariness. The Lord is ever busied within her, by his Spirit, strengthening and maturing this new creation—in mortifying, weakening, and destroying the old Adam. It is Christ, who inwardly chastens the Shulamite and consoles her; who cheers and strengthens her; who visits her with wholesome affliction, and imparts to her delightful peace, exactly as the case requires. May she not therefore pronounce herself a comely tabernacle, a habitation of the Lord, a tent which her Bridegroom delights to visit? Thus she stands there with the door wide open, imploring and sighing; and it may with truth be said of her, “Behold a tabernacle of the Lord among men! O, Israel, where is there a people so glorious, to whom their gods are so near, as is the Lord our God and Saviour to thee.”

“I am comely as the tents of Kedar:” this comeliness consists, lastly, in her no longer following her own inclinations; but as the tents of Kedar are borne by the shepherds, so is she borne by her King, removed and placed wherever it may please Him and His love. She is no longer her own, but her faithful Lord and Saviour’s, both soul and body, in life and in death. She knows herself to be in his hands, in his bosom; and she willingly surrenders herself to his guidance, whether he may please to lead her into green pastures, or assign her a place in the desert. And like as the Kedarites

wander with their tents, and pitch them sometimes in one place, and sometimes in another ; she also is aware that she is a stranger in the world, and rejoices in the knowledge that she has here no abiding city, but seeks, with earnest longing, that which is to come, and contemplates the time with joyful hope, when her King shall entirely destroy her earthly tabernacle, and assign her one all-glorious and beautiful. Yes, thou art black, thou bride of the Lord ; but we will not look upon thee because thou art black, for the Sun has made thee so. Thou art likewise fair and comely ; comely as the curtains of Solomon, and as the tents of Kedar.

III.

Let us now attend to what the Bride has further to relate : “ My mother’s children,” she says, “ were angry with me ; they made me keeper of the vineyards ; but my own vineyard have I not kept.” By her mother’s children, she means the children of the kingdom, who journeyed with her on the same road, and participated with her in the same spiritual privileges ; but whose walk in the light of Jacob had been of too short duration, and their experience in Divine things too limited, for them to conceive that a life in God could be a concealed one, full of godly activity, but devoid of all exterior splendour. A child of God in a state of dejection was to them as yet an incomprehensible

mystery. Now it appears to me, that it may have been precisely such a state of apparent dejection and barrenness, in which they discovered the Shulamite to be. She, whom they had known as so highly a gifted, joyful witness to the truth ; whose distinguished and effective course apparently resembled that of a prophetess ; who had been as a light shining in a dark place, inexhaustibly rich in sententious wisdom, in awakening addresses, in feeling effusions and fervent prayers ; who understood how to make all hearts overflow with living waters, to melt them into sacred emotions, and to hurry them from one fragrant eminence to another ;—she, who had only lived for the brethren and their communion ; who had hastened from assembly to assembly, there to pour forth her treasures ; who had devoted all her energies to the kingdom of God, and from morning to evening, with the most flaming zeal, had thought of nothing but converting, edifying, strengthening, rousing and comforting the brethren ; and in the performance of all which she had been so conspicuous ;—behold, how suddenly she is overcome ! This overflowing spring, how suddenly is it exhausted ; this rose, so recently blooming and redolent, how quickly has it lost its beauty and its fragrance. Behold, the Shulamite's fire is extinguished, her zeal cooled, her sensibility dried up ; her evangelizing spirit, how dead ; her mouth closed ; her carriage, how

constrained, reserved, and unsocial! The sisters see it with sorrow; they are heartily grieved to have no further communion with their friend. Yes, they even behold it with indignation, for in this transformation they perceive nothing less than an entire relapse into a state of nature. Alas! to her own sisters she has become, not only a riddle but a vexation. Yet, so far from having fallen away, or from having departed from the school of her Lord and Master, she has been elevated by him to a higher class in this school, where she shall learn to believe without seeing or tasting, and with Asaph to desire nothing in the world but God: that though heart and flesh may fail, yet to rejoice and be in perfect peace—not as arising from any subordinate communications from the Lord, but because he is himself the strength of her heart, and her eternal portion. With these things her sisters were not then acquainted. Their inward light was too faint for them to perceive, in the change that had passed on Shulamite, in her external sterility and blackness, the pure benevolent disciple of the Lord, the guidance of the most faithful of all shepherds. They imagined it to proceed from very different causes, and Shulamite could not please them: “My mother’s children were angry with me.”

And what would they now in their folly do with her? They would make her keeper of *their* vineyards; that is, they would attract her back to the

scene of usefulness, activity, and tumult, in which they so greatly delighted: in their kind but blind zeal, they would have her re-assume their favourite form and aspect of Christian life, and thus interfere, uncalled, in the work of the Lord: and behold they succeeded, at least for a short time. The Shulamite yielded, and the Lord permitted it. "They made me the keeper of the vineyards."

The experience of the Shulamite has, in various ways, been that of many. Do you inquire how? Listen: Is a man a Christian? has he bid adieu to the world? and does he live to God? Is he enlightened, rich in experience, and by the brethren accounted faithful, sincere, active, and qualified? they at once begin to calculate how he may be made useful. He is asked to preach in one place, in another to direct some society; business and labour are heaped upon him, and he is expected to undertake whatever is offered to his management. He submits; though it may often be more from a carnal than a sanctified spirit: for how can he refuse the brethren, particularly as their requests are confined to sacred things? His occupation begins and ends but with the day; he is so active, so clever, does every thing so well, that he is praised and encouraged from all sides, till it becomes his delight. Thus he is incessantly engaged in the work of the Lord. He preaches, exhorts, expounds the Scriptures to the brethren, prays with them,

relates to them the passing events of the kingdom of God, superintends their societies, and does a thousand other things. That all this is good and praiseworthy in itself, who will deny ? Yet, before he is aware, his own heart, with its wants, has been lost sight of ; his secret healthful intercourse with the Lord is interrupted, and the desire for it gradually extinguished ; as if the soul had been satiated with this external employment : but when God in his mercy restores light to the mind of the believer, he is constrained to join in the complaint of the Shulamite : “ They made me keeper of the vineyards ; but my own vineyard have I not kept.”

But it is asked, was it in this way that Shulamite likewise forgot her vineyard ? I answer No. She found herself in very different circumstances ; and I will endeavour to describe them. The sun has burnt us, when we have lost the sensible tokens of God’s grace, and feel ourselves deprived of the consolation, peace, and hope which had been our confidence and rejoicing, and cast out into a barren land. What the love of God designs by such seemingly hard dealings with his faithful people, is well known. Our associates mark the change ; they are displeased that our glory has passed away, that our beauty is so faded. They are angry with us, and even apprehensive that we have fallen from grace. Our mortification is deep, we cannot bear the suspicion ; and consequently, strain every nerve

to reinstate ourselves in our former condition. We again put ourselves forward, but the Lord has not called ; we again attempt to prophesy, but the Spirit is not with us ; we seek again to appear as one of the anointed, but our oil is consumed ; we wish to warm others, but our own fire is extinguished. In short, instead of bowing before the Lord, and awaiting, in prayerful submission, the return of his pentecostal breathing, we try to sail with an adverse wind ; we try the oars of our natural strength, and resolve to supply the deficiency of Divine inspiration from our own resources ; to take again upon our own shoulders the work which Christ reserves for himself alone ; and, instead of drawing water from the Rock that follows us, to force it from the barren sandy waste of our own nature. Our state is lamentable : we are separated from the Lord, and have strayed into, and lost ourselves in, a maze of presumptuous self-will and self-prescribed performances. And if the Lord again open our eyes, we must judge ourselves, and complain, in the language of the Bride, “ They have made me keeper of the vineyards ; but my own vineyard have I not kept.” Instead of abiding in union with the Lord, enjoying his favour, and participating in the abundant fulness of his vineyard ;—instead of remaining at the Fountain of life, and surrendering myself like a child to the guidance of Jesus, I have lost

myself in the dark wilderness of self-prescribed duties, estranged from God.

Let us here conclude. My brethren, when after the Babylonish captivity the city of Jerusalem had been rebuilt, Nehemiah gave this command: "Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened, until the sun is hot!" This command is spiritually in force to this day. Jerusalem is opened to no one, till the Eternal Sun of the universe has shed his heat upon him; till he has become black in his own eyes. Oh that each one amongst us, who now accounts himself fair and beautiful, may soon, from a deep and thorough conviction of his misery, be able to declare with Shulamite, "I am black, O ye daughters of Jerusalem!" Not that he should then attempt to purify himself: the Ethiopian cannot change his skin, or the leopard his spots; but may he experience the royal purifying power of Him who clothes all his children in white robes. May the Eternal King be with us all; may He encircle us in his golden mantle, and make us comely as the tents of Kedar. Amen.

SERMON IV.

SOLOMON'S SONG VIII. 6—7.

Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm :
for love is strong as death ; jealousy is cruel as the grave :
the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.

THE words we are about to consider, are not those of the Bridegroom, Christ ; but of the Bride, the awakened believing soul. She begs her heavenly Friend to preserve her still in his love ; and at the same time relates, in few but in expressive terms, the nature of Christ's love.

Let us then consider, in reference to the text, the love of Christ to sinners. Let us contemplate it :—

- I. As a great and free love.
- II. As a strong love.
- III. As a jealous love.
- IV. As a faithful love.

I.

“Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm.” These aspirations of the Shu-

lamite appear, indeed, to be lofty ; but in what do they exceed, in extent or magnitude, what the Saviour continually does for sinners without their solicitation ? He sets them as a seal upon his heart, as a seal upon his arm ! The Saviour's heart is the inexhaustible source of all love. If but the smallest drop from this fountain enters the human heart, it immediately dilates and overflows with love. Witness its surprising effects on Abraham ;—the love of God in him absorbed the love of nature, and stretched his arm to offer his beloved, his only son, a sacrifice to the Lord. What a noble display of it in David !—when with a love contrary to nature, and elevated high as the heavens above it, he wept the death of Saul, his mortal enemy, and broke out in bitter lamentations, that the shield of the mighty had been cast vilely away, as though he had not been anointed. Behold it in Moses !—when in the desert he cried unto the Lord : “ Oh this people have sinned a great sin ; yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.” What amazing love ! Hear the prayer of Stephen !—stoned by his enemies, and prostrated on the earth, with his last breath, he cries to heaven : “ Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” Behold a Paul !—renouncing joyfully all the advantages and pleasures which the world has to offer, suffering ignominy and persecution, scourging and stoning,

imprisonment and chains, and not even counting his life dear unto himself, that he might bring the Balm of Gilead to his brethren, who were sitting in the shadow of death. The love of these men was astonishingly great! Who can utter all the purity and faithfulness, the height, length, breadth and depth of such love? And yet it was but a small drop from that ocean of love which flows in the heart of Christ.

But who can declare the love of Jesus? By what standard shall it be estimated, in what language can it be expressed? There is nothing with which it can be compared; the boldest imagination cannot grasp it. It is a depth, into which angelic spirits look adoringly down, but cannot fathom; a height, to which the thoughts of seraphim cannot attain. As he himself has been loved by the Father from all eternity, in the same measure and degree does he love all who are the objects of his regard. No mind can comprehend, no imagination conceive, the love of Christ; it surpasses all knowledge and all thought. And his power, like his love, is boundless, unsearchable, incomprehensible. Obedient to his will, the waves of the Red Sea mounted into a heap like a wall of crystal; at his command the solid rock became a fountain of waters; the impregnable walls of Jericho fell down at the sound of a trumpet, and the sun stood still in the firmament; with a word he restored life to corrup-

tion, and called the dead out of their graves ; and this was but a small display of his power, a trifle for his gigantic arm. Did he not call a world into existence out of nothing, and command that to be which was not, and it stood forth ? Did not his arm plant Orion in the heavens, and group the Plæiades ? And yet we have seen but a shadow of his power ! He can create and do his pleasure ; as the Scriptures declare, “ All power is given him, in heaven and on earth.” Oh who can measure the power of his arm ? His arm is like his heart, his power like his love. We have attempted a faint description of them, but the thunder of his power who can understand ?

And who are the recipients of this love, and for whom is this mighty power revealed ? In general it is similarity of taste or disposition that attracts men to each other, and forms the bond of union between them. But the love of Jesus is guided by other rules. It was not the angels and cherubim, who were the exclusive objects of his love : “ He took not on him the nature of angels,” says St. Paul ; it was not the just, the virtuous, the noble, the wise, the mighty, and the great, after the flesh, that he sought to bear them on his heart ; for his love is the love of sinners, and his arm is stretched forth to the miserable. It was for us, the children of death, that the bowels of his mercy yearned from all eternity, and for whom his heart

burned with infinite tenderness. How wondrous that love, which could impel the Sovereign of the universe to lay aside his glory, and in the form of sinful flesh to descend into this dark valley of tears ! A love which prompted him to assume our griefs, the whole weight and curse of our iniquities ! A love, which moved Him to become the most despised and vile amongst the children of men, to humble himself even unto death, and to shed his blood upon the cross ! What an amazing love ! And yet it was a love for sinners, and for sinners only. It was not for angels, but for thee and me, my dear brethren, that he submitted to be thus straitened. The poor sinner is the object of his love, the curse-stricken earth the theatre of its display, and the deadened heart the subject on which it operates. And wherever he has revealed himself in the world, he has revealed himself as one compassionating the miserable, reclaiming the wanderer, and as the sinner's friend. Such is the heart of Jesus ; and his arm, his power, is wielded by this heart, by this love of sinners. He has ever acted and governed in the world, as if he possessed his power solely for the deliverance, the salvation of sinners. For them he vanquished hell, and trampled Satan under his feet. For them he conquered death, and burst the bands of the grave ; and all that he has done, or is daily performing, is designed to accomplish the salvation of sinners.

What do we need more ? His heart is for us ; his power is for us. He lives not for himself, he lives for sinners. In this we rejoice !

But there is one peculiarity in his love, at the thought of which we should humble ourselves in the dust, and devoutly adore. In what manner, under what conditions, and at what period, do you imagine it to be, that he receives the sinner to his love ? Some of you, perhaps, may be ready to reply : When the sinner begins to think about a reformation, then Jesus also begins to love. But I say, No ; He loves him before. But, perhaps, it commences when the sinner sincerely begins to inquire after and seek the way of life ? No !—long before these sincere desires arise in the sinner, he has been loved by Him who both imparts the will and perfects the good within him. Behold the Lord sets the sinner as a seal upon his heart, as a seal upon his arm ! and this is something unspeakably great ! What is a seal ? It is the clear, perfect impression of a figure engraven upon a seal, or signet ring. When therefore it is said, that the Lord Jesus sets the sinner as a seal upon his heart, it can only mean, that he takes a true and perfect impression of the sinner. He takes his true figure as a ruined, lost creature, with all the marks of sin broadly and clearly impressed upon him ; and when it is further said, he sets him as a seal upon his arm, it means, that, before any good is in the sinner, the

arm of the Lord is promised, and extended for his relief ; that for his salvation, the power and love of Jesus are united. And thus it really is ! Yes, believe it, before a spark of the new life had been kindled within you, before the smallest change had taken place, you were already received to the love of Jesus ; for how had you otherwise become converted and believing, had not the sustaining love of Him who is the author and finisher of faith, been previously imparted to you ? For that you have not converted yourself, you are perfectly convinced. Every one, who has undergone this change, confesses with deep humiliation : I have not chosen thee, but thou hast chosen me. When you were still in your iniquities, and entertained not the most distant thought of submitting your heart to God, even then the Saviour's love had sought you out. He had placed you as a seal upon his heart—that is, you had become the object of his merciful love ; your image, with all the stains of sin upon it, was impressed upon his heart ; and when you really were converted to the Lord, then his arm executed in you the eternal counsels of his love. Yes, on every one who is born again, the words of our Lord are fulfilled : “ I have loved thee—not from the moment of thy conversion—but I have loved thee with an everlasting love ; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.” In thine iniquities have I loved thee ; as a sinner wert thou engraven

on my heart. I set thee as a seal upon my heart, as a seal upon my arm ; before thou calledst, I heard and answered thee. Behold this is the great, the free love of our Surety !

II.

And in the same degree that this love is great, free, and unconditional, it is likewise strong and powerful. But how strong ? Strong, says the Shulamite, as death. What a striking similitude ! Yes, strong as death—we have ourselves experienced it. Who can withstand death ? With invincible power he wields his sceptre over all flesh—the strongest he casts to the earth, the most mighty become his prey.

And who can resist the love of Christ, when it goes forth towards the sinner, and casts its net around him ? A Saul tried, but found it vain to kick against the pricks ; the Samaritan woman was not long able to strive against, and to evade it ; and Nathaniel, in spite of his conviction that nothing good could come out of Nazareth, was soon obliged to confess : “ Rabbi, Thou art the son of God ; Thou art the King of Israel ! ” The jailer likewise, with his heart subdued, fell down, and anxiously sighed ; “ What must I do to be saved ? ” And the heathen centurion was constrained to exclaim : “ Truly this was the Son of God.” Yes, strong as death is the love that seeks sinners, who can resist it ? It pur-

sues the sinner, who is its object, through all his devious courses ; it follows him into the stillness of the closet, into the bustle of the world, in the midst of dissipation, and on the seat of the scorner ; it presses upon him in every way, till his heart is vanquished, and he is rescued from the paths of death. How long, my brethren, did not we strive against its assaults, and seek to escape the net ; how long did not we close our ears against its call, and, as it were, struggle not to be overcome ? But behold, has it not been too strong for us ? Has it not at last subdued and made us captive ? Yes, God be praised ! it has also broken our hard and obdurate hearts, and notwithstanding our resistance, has forced us into the bonds of the covenant ! God be thanked for ever, we have ourselves experienced ; that his love is strong as death ! Who can resist it ?

Love is strong as death. Does not death separate man from this world and its concerns ? Does it not snatch him away from all that is earthly and transitory ? And behold, the love of Christ does the same. No sooner is its influence felt upon the soul—no sooner are we participatively assured of its possession, and able to say with Paul : I also have obtained mercy—than we bid the world farewell ; its pleasures become embittered, its waters turbid and vapid ; for we now drink from other fountains ; and in places where we were formerly at home, we now feel ourselves strangers, uneasy

and oppressed. Oh, how wonderful the change which passes on the heart, as soon as it hears the Lord call it by name, and the words, "Thou art mine !" vibrate within it. Then a Magdalene quickly casts away her follies, and becomes the handmaid of the Lord. Then a Paul esteems all that he had accounted gain, as loss and dung, and is Christ's alone. Then we willingly abandon honour and pleasure, fame, applause, and whatever else the world has to offer, and follow Christ. Yes, the love of Jesus is strong as death. Wherever it is unfolded, felt, and experienced, it separates the man, heart and soul, from the world and its trifles. Then Abramam can no longer dwell in Ur, Lot in Sodom, nor Moses at the court of Egypt. The heart pants, and struggles to be liberated ; we weigh the anchor and launch from the shore of this world. The love of Jesus is strong as death. With the destructive energy of death, and as the fire of lightning, it assails the old man within us. Where the love of Jesus is perceived, and his grace experienced, there also is a constant inward dying, an incessant consuming ; there the old Adam lies in the flames that will burn him to ashes. Oh, it is hard to confess, that our sins have caused the Lord of Glory to shed his blood upon the cross—that our sins have occasioned all his humiliation and suffering ! How inconceivably mortifying is the conviction, that we must be received to his arms and to

his love, as the vilest of sinners ! it degrades us in the dust of self-abasement, and overwhelms us with shame and disgrace ; while it renders a life after the flesh distasteful and disgusting. With the consciousness : I have obtained mercy ; pride cannot rear its head ; avarice cannot thrive : lust cannot spring up ; that is impossible ; for where the love of Christ takes possession of the soul, there it is as death, destructive as the fire of brimstone, and pestilence, to the old man.

III.

And behold, to the strength of death, the love of Christ to sinners unites the firmness of hell.* Its fervour, says the Shulamite, is unchanging as the grave, and our hearts should gratefully respond—"God be praised !" The Shulamite speaks with force and power, but with truth and beauty. It is as she has said. The love of Jesus to the elect is a zealous, ardent, yea, and a jealous love. It encircles its object with a firmness so immovable and undeviating, that the idea of a surrender on its part, is as little to be entertained as that of a surrender of the lost on the part of hell. Though on earth Satan must renounce his prey at the bidding of the

* This is a literal rendering of the author's words, who has of course followed the idea conveyed by Luther's translating the word קשה by "firm," which is, perhaps, more correct than "cruel," as the English version has it.—ED.

Lion of the tribe of Judah ; but if he have dragged it down into the bottomless pit, the gates are closed, and none shall open them. Hell asserts its rights and its possessions. No sighs, no grief, can move it ; no tears, or lamentations of the damned : it holds them in its gloomy caverns with stern, inexorable cruelty, and the smoke of their torments ascends for ever and ever. And such is the constancy of the love of Christ. The Lord Jesus keeps what he has. "My sheep are mine," he says, "and none shall pluck them out of my hand." Should the devil, the accuser, appear, and claim the sinner as his own ; should he heap every deadly sin upon his head ; should Moses arise, and call upon the Lord to condemn the despiser of his laws ; should even the angels of God cry together, Away with him ! the thief is not fit for Paradise !—what could it avail ? For if he has once taken the sinner to his heart, his love is firm as hell. And whether it were Satan, Moses, or the angels, his answer would be : "Away with you all. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." His love is an unyielding love : it never relinquishes what it has once adopted. It turned the lost son from the husks of the swine-troughs, from the seat of the scorner and the profane. It followed Solomon into the temples of Satan, into the assemblies of heathen women, and the dwellings of lewdness ; yes, it pursued him even to the altars of strange gods, and rested not till it had

reclaimed him. Such is the love of Christ! and it declares to Satan, "I am stronger than thou art." What it has it has, and never abandons. And if Satan assail the Bride, a conflict immediately ensues; which ceases not till the dragon is discomfited. Yes, the love of Christ for his people is firm and unrelenting as hell. "I am persuaded," says St. Paul, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers; nor things present, nor things to come; nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Once more.—The fervour of his love is firm as hell, and is mingled with a holy jealousy. Where is there a soul with whom he has deigned to hold converse, that has not experienced how jealous is his love? He will possess his people exclusively, not divided with another; he will not suffer his followers to adhere to Belial, and coquette with the world: therefore his efforts are incessant, and endlessly varied, till his Bride has cordially renounced the world, and is entirely his own. What has been our own experience, my brethren, when we have turned back into the world; when, fascinated by its charms, we have forgotten Him, or have attempted to associate Him with Belial; when our speech and our actions have faithlessly declared with Simon, "I know not this man;" when closing our eyes and our hearts against Him, we

have again demeaned ourselves as men of this world? What were our sensations when reflection returned? Did not a day of sorrow and anguish, a day of storm and tempest, of darkness and gloom, break in upon the soul? Our peace and joy had departed; we felt as though we had rejected his grace; and we began anxiously to inquire how we might appease the Lord! He seemed to have turned from us in anger, and our souls endured the torments of hell. Behold in this his jealousy and his displeasure! But, blessed be God, it is only the anger of love. His tenderness is wounded because we have left him, and because he has for a time been deprived of the joy of possessing us wholly and undivided. This pains and afflicts him. It provokes his love, and therefore his jealousy is kindled, and he plunges us down into hell! Into hell! Yes, the Lord sometimes conducts even his people into hell; but, God be praised, he does not leave them there.

IV.

Strong as death is the love of Jesus. His jealousy is firm as hell: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench it, neither can the floods drown it. By these words Shulamite describes the faithfulness of Christ, as opposed to our unfaithfulness. How different is it with our love towards

each other, even when it is most sincere and pure! contrasted with the love of Christ, it is but as the glimmering of a torch, which but few waters would suffice to quench. The slightest degree of coldness or unrequited affection, the slightest offence or inconstancy on the part of those we love, is sufficient to estrange our hearts, and quench our love. Such floods it cannot survive. And how is it with our love to the Lord? Alas! if he do not continually quicken it, by fresh and sensible supplies of his grace, it is soon reduced to the faintest glimmer. The streams of worldly temptation, or the waters of conflict and trial, need only beat against it; the Lord need only for a moment hide himself, and withdraw from us the sweet consciousness of his presence, when our hearts begin to cool, and the melody of our soul to cease. Our love is fickle; it may cool and expire; we are faithless and inconstant. But Jesus is faithful; his love to his people is immovable; the coals thereof are coals of fire: no streams, however violent, no floods, however turbulent, can extinguish, or even damp his love to sinners. Not the floods of our iniquities? No, not even these. How great was that flood of sin and transgression which David poured upon the love of his Surety! But, behold! his love burnt on, and maintained the superiority. He did not forsake the murderer and the adulterer; but kindly extended to him his arm, on which he had

placed him as a seal, and mercifully assisted him out of the miry pit, and placed his feet again upon the rock ; and David remained, what he previously had been, the man after God's own heart. The unfaithfulness of Simon passed as a flood over the love of Jesus ! Another would have said, Now our friendship is at an end ; with you I will have no further intercourse. But the love of Jesus is not a glimmering taper, that the first wind can extinguish. The coals thereof are coals of fire, which, though floods of inconstancy, coldness, and ingratitude pass over it, continues triumphantly to burn, and break through every assault. The look of wounded affection which he cast on Simon from the Judgment Hall, after he had denied him, still continues to excite our admiration and wonder ; there was a magnanimity, a divinity in it, which we can neither grasp nor comprehend. His love stands fast. "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed ; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee." "My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all ; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

But may not a man go on comfortably in his sins, if he knows he should not on that account lose the favour of God ? Oh, how often are we obliged

to listen to this miserable and foolish objection ! A little reflection might teach, that the love of sin, and the thought of sinning that grace might abound, are incompatible with the life of one who is born again ; they are utterly impossible. If you entertain a propensity to sin that grace may abound, you are not Christians ; your new birth is a pretence ; you belong to those who are without, and have not yet obtained the smallest interest in Christ. Let this sink deep into your hearts, and judge yourselves by it. But we rejoice, and praise God that our hope of salvation is founded on such a rock as the love of Jesus. Did our hope rest on our love to Him, it would weaken and die if ever our love dwindled and expired : were it based upon our faith, we should be obliged to abandon it, if our faith became obscured : still less can it be grounded on our sensations and devotional feelings, for then we should sink into despair whenever our hearts became cold and barren. No : our hope is founded on the love of Jesus to us ; and here it has found a secure anchorage. It is based on the love which is strong as death and firm as the grave ; whose coals are coals of fire, which many waters cannot quench. It is founded on the love which pursues the sinner through all his deviations and wanderings ; which loves him, though overshadowed by many inconsistencies ; and which stands unshaken, though ours may waver and de-

cline. His love to us is our resting-place, our sure foundation ; it is the prop by which we rise when we have fallen ; the staff which sustains us on our pilgrimage through this valley of tears. It is the source of our joy, the spring of our courage, and the fire by which we are refined ; it is our sanctification and our life. But who can number all the blessings that are treasured up for us in the love of Jesus ? Then take thy harp, O Israel ! Believe and rejoice ; for thou art encircled by the arms of Everlasting Love.

SERMON V.

SOLOMON'S SONG I. 7, 8.

Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon : for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions ? If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents.

THERE is scarcely any state of spiritual life that is not here and there described in the Song of Solomon, at least in the way of allusion. This little book is a true mirror of the heart of every child of God. The impure world, indeed, discovers in it only its own vile likeness. But is the stream to blame, that, when a Moor surveys himself in the pure and limpid waters, an ugly, black countenance is presented to his view ? The fault lies not in the mirror, but in the face of the Moor ; and were he on that account to censure the innocent stream, or, in imitation of a certain raging conqueror, to beat it with rods, would it not be absurd and unjust ? Yet such is the procedure of unbelievers with the Song of Songs. But, let us not be turned aside thereby from this stream,

which flows from the rock of Zion, or suffer our pleasure therein to be corrupted. We drink water from it which springs up to everlasting life.

The text contains a conversation between Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom, and his Bride, the Church, or the soul of an individual believer. The sentiment breathed by the Shulamite, is that of longing for the coming of the Lord, and ardent desire to be near him. But the answer of Christ calms the longing soul, points out to it the way, and imparts wholesome advice. Many a soul amongst us is in the same state with Shulamite ; many require the same refreshment. Let us therefore consider the words more fully, and reflect,

- I. On Shulamite's state.
- II. On her address to the Lord.
- III. On her question.
- IV. On Christ's counter-question.
- V. On His advice.

I.

We are already acquainted with the state of Shulamite's soul. She has herself, in the preceding words, disburdened her heart, and discovered to us its inward aspect. "I am black," she complains, "O ye daughters of Jerusalem. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the Sun hath looked upon me." In the text she describes her state

as that of noon-day—that is, she is exposed to the noon-day heat, when the sun has attained his greatest altitude, and shoots his scorching rays perpendicularly on the head. “Tell me,” she exclaims, “where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flocks to rest at noon?” The raptures of morning are past! For it is morning in the soul, when it resembles a garden of spices, and the Spirit, like the south wind, blowing freshly through it, causes our fragrance to flow abroad; and we hear its sound, and perceive its influence. It is morning when the King himself draws near, and our spikenard sends forth its perfume; when our inward spiritual life assumes sensibility and feeling, and floods the soul like a fruitful vivifying water; when the presence of the Lord is powerfully experienced, the comfort of assurance blissfully enjoyed, the love of Christ ardently felt, and the powers of the world to come tasted in copious draughts. How delightful is morning! How pleasant the air! How mild and exhilarating the warmth of the sun! Then the valleys are filled with balsamic odours, and the plains are moistened by the early dew; then the vines breathe forth their fragrance, and the turtle is heard in the grove. It was morning in the life of Shulamite, when she exclaimed: “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine. Thy name is as ointment poured forth; therefore the virgins love thee. Draw me, we will

run after thee : the king brought me into his chambers ; we will be glad and rejoice in thee." Yes, then the light of morning shone upon her head. What a happy state ! To soar above the earth, like a young eagle ; to be placed beyond the fear of death and hell ; to be able joyfully to embrace all the brethren in Christ ; to have a heart expansive as the ocean ; to be also dear to all the brethren, and overflowing with streams of living water.

But the light in which we now meet the beloved Shulamite, is not that of morning ; alas ! all with her is changed. Her very appearance betrays it. Where is now the clear sunshine, that once animated her countenance ; and the eye, sparkling with joy, the lip breathing eloquence, the lofty enthusiasm, the intense love of her espousals, and her glowing testimony ? What became of it all ? Alas ! they seem to have died away. She resembles a flower, that has lost both its scent and its enamel. Shulamite is afflicted and cast down. What then has happened to her ? Has she perhaps suffered a serious fall ? Not exactly so. Then she is assailed by doubts, and asks with John, " Art thou he that should come ? " Not so. Then she has encountered severe temptations, and conflicts with Satan ? No, that is not the case. She says, it is noon in her soul. She reminds us of a hot, sultry, summer's-day ; all nature droops ; the flowers hang down their head ; the grass is faded and

dry ; the beasts pant for breath, the birds are silent in the trees ; dark clouds of dust obscure the roads, and all is dull, weary, and languid. And this she will say is her spiritual state. Oh, we understand her well ; it is the state of barrenness, of insensibility, in which she finds herself ; the state of spiritual nakedness and destitution, in which we ourselves perceive no trace of the new life, and of the gracious presence of the Lord ; in which a difference between ourselves and the unregenerate is scarce discernible ; in which we feel no love, no necessity of prayer, and we begin to waver, and to doubt whether we are in a state of grace, or no. This is the noon in which we find the Shulamite.

II.

Shulamite in her distress applies to the Lord ; to him she will make known her grief. In this she does wisely. There is no helper besides Him ; and even though we may be unable to pray, we should prostrate ourselves in silence before him, as if we would say, Behold our misery ! It is vain to look elsewhere, this is the only well, from which water can be obtained in time of drought. "Thou," she sighs, "whom my soul loveth !" Thou ! What a singular address ! Why does she not add his name ? Ah, in her present state of mind she knows not what to call him. There are

times, in which we know not how to address the Lord, except with a simple, Thou! Thou! and that is all. Thus we sometimes experience sudden abstractions of mind, like in the third heaven; moments of unequalled mental vision and communion with Jesus; when suddenly he, who is the fairest among the children of men, displays himself to our view in all his beauty, as though we saw him face to face; and all the bliss, that is eternal at his right hand, is imbibed in the soul, as with one draught. The entire greatness of his love, is unveiled to our view; the happiness of being reconciled by his blood, is felt in all its magnitude, and the delight of the heart exceeds all bounds. Then, indeed, one would gladly speak, and call upon him by name; but what name is sufficiently expressive to describe Him whom we behold and taste? His most glorious titles appear to us inadequate, and too mean for such a Lord. Absorbed in admiration and excess of bliss, a simple "O Thou!" is all we are able to utter. But there are other states of feeling in which we know not by what title to address him. By what name shall we call upon him, when, as convicted sinners, we lie prostrate in the dust before his throne of grace, and cannot venture even to lift up our eyes? Shall we call him our Lord? Ah, we are rebels, and not servants. Shall we address him as a Saviour? How can we presume; what claims have we on his mer-

cy? Or as our Mediator and Intercessor? Alas, for creatures so deeply fallen as we are, he will never intercede! All the sweet and endearing titles by which his children are permitted to address him, falter upon our tongues; and Thou! Thou! is all that our trembling lips can utter. And when in his mysterious dealings he has again deprived us of all that he had once vouchsafed to us—has withdrawn himself from our view, and surrounded himself with clouds and darkness, so that we no longer taste his grace, or enjoy his love, as was the case with Shulamite,—how shall we then call upon him? by what name address him? As a friend? We no longer recognize him as such. As a Bridegroom? Ah, the days of our espousals are past. As a Prince of peace? Where is his peace! As our guide? Alas, we wander forsaken. At such times we are tempted to ask with Manoah, “What is thy name?” And, Wonderful! is the only title by which we can address him! Sometimes even we appear to have lost all trace of him as a “Wonderful God;” it seems as though he guided us no longer, or concerns himself no more about us. Then a sighing of “O thou!” is our only resource. Thus it was with our Shulamite. But the remainder of her address must cause us astonishment; “Thou,” she says, “whom my soul loveth.” How strange! We thought her love was at an end. Yes, that she herself also most

firmly believes. But does she not say, "Thou whom my soul loveth?" The words have indeed escaped her, but I believe she is not insensible of it. Ah! how frequently is this the lamentation of benighted and tempted souls. Their complaint is incessant, that there is no more love in their heart, no desire after the Lord, and yet, in contradiction to themselves, they continually exclaim, if not in words, yet most loudly by their actions: "Thou whom my soul loveth!" Singular people! who do nothing else than run about from morning till night inquiring and seeking after Jesus, like sheep lost in the desert, bleating after their shepherd. How delighted would you be to find him again; and should any one advise you to abandon the search, 'not for mines of gold, or royal diadems,' would be your answer; 'no, rather give up all than give up Christ.' And yet, you say, you have no love to him after whom you long: no, not the smallest!! How strange, how singular! thus to run after one in whom you have no interest; thus to lament his absence with so much affliction. O ye favoured children! This afflicted look, this oppressed mien, this painful lamentation, "I have lost the Lord"—this seeking and longing—what is it but an expressive, "Thou, Thou, whom my soul loveth?" What is it, however its reflection may be concealed from yourselves, but a look of the purest love, which, be assured, still exists and works

unseen in the deepest recesses of the soul ; which in the children of God can never be extinguished ; which survives the bitterest temptations, the greatest spiritual desertions, and proclaims, under every change of circumstance, its existence and life, by manifold, though not unfrequently by very faint, manifestations. Yes, the lambs of Jesus always love him ; and even when the lamentation escapes them, that they love him not, the tone in which the complaint is uttered, imparts to it an entirely different meaning ; and a sensitive ear distinctly perceives in it the tender greeting, "Thou whom my soul loveth."

III.

Having listened to the salutation of the afflicted Bride, let us now hear what it is she really desires, and what the nature of the inquiry she has addressed to the Lord. "Tell me," she says, "O Thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon ; for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions ?" His companions are the ministers of his word, the preachers and prophets whom he has called ; and it is a great honour, which Shulamite confers on them, when she calls them the companions of Christ ! Elsewhere, we are termed messengers in Christ's stead, and his

fellow labourers. To what dignity are we here raised ! Our hearts might well be oppressed, and force us to exclaim, ‘Lord God ! send another, I am not fit to preach.’ The flocks of these companions, are those who have believed through their word, their spiritual children. Amongst these Shulamite had wandered ; but she had no desire to do so longer ; what had it availed her ? Nothing ; no sermon, however beautiful, no devotional exercises, no exhortations of the brethren, had been able to make her depressed and withered heart again to blossom, or to reassure her sinking soul. “Ah,” she says, “suffer me no longer to wander in vain among the flocks of thy companions ; but come to me thyself !” But the words may likewise be rendered thus : “That I may no longer be amongst the flocks of thy companions, as one veiled”—that is, as a widow. ‘Ah,’ she will say, ‘while thy other children boast of the sweetness of thy presence, of the consolations they receive from thee, and of the frequency of thy visits ; must I cast down my eyes in melancholy and silence ; and be a barren tree amongst the fruitful, or as a sick lamb amongst the vigorous of the flock ? No one derives benefit from me ; I am to the brethren as one dead ; I have lost my beloved ; my friend has forsaken me ; he cheers me no longer ; I am solitary and disconsolate ; and shall I not wear the

veil of mourning? Such is the state in which Shulamite describes herself to be, and she prays the Lord to relieve her from it.

“Tell me,” she says, “where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon.” Yes, that is what she so much desires to know. In the first place, were he in circumstances like those in which she then found herself, where he really feedeth? But what is it you wish so much to know, beloved Shulamite? We do not understand your words. Do you inquire where he would then find food for himself? Oh, he would find abundance in your heart, although you do not think so. This anxiety about him, this seeking and longing, this inquiry and running after your lost friend, he is well pleased to see; that is to him food, a delight, a sweet repast; even in the barren desert he can find food. But probably you wish to know what food he has provided for such poor miserable sheep as you have now become? Secret food, hidden pastures. He sustains them by an unseen energy, with a concealed faith, of which they are not sensible; and with a hope whose sweetness they have not tasted; but yet it is near them. He likewise sometimes feeds such afflicted lambs who know not whether they belong to the Shepherd or not, upon the field of their own early experience; he conducts them back in spirit to the period when they certainly experienced the kiss of his love, and

when he made his covenant with them. With David they then remember their song in the night ; and the recollection, in some degree, revives their courage. Or he points them, in his word, to the promises which assure them that the bruised reed shall not be broken, or the smoking flax be quenched. In short, there is never any want of food and spiritual nourishment for Christ's sheep ; no, not even when they appear to wade in the sandy desert, where no vegetation regales the eye, where not a blade of grass presents itself to their longing appetites. "Tell me," the Shulamite asks again, "where thou retest at noon?" That he rests—that she knows, that she feels. The sound of his footsteps she no longer hears, neither can she perceive any trace of his presence or his influence, either within or around her. Ah, beloved soul, if thou didst but know it, he rests quite near to thee, in thy bark, in thy chamber ; yes, even in thy heart ;—though indeed thou perceivest him not. Now she has no rest till she has again found him, till she again possesses him, and can say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his : he feedeth among the lilies." Without Him, oh ! where can she be at peace, with all her sinfulness, her misery, her weakness and infirmity ? No, she must have him again ! She wanders from place to place ; now she seeks him in the solitude of her closet, if peradventure she may find him there ; now she looks for him

amongst the assembled brethren, and asks, Is he here? Then she searches for him in books and spiritual songs, if by any means she may find him. All kinds of advisers come to her; "Oh!" they say, "be not so vehement; wait with patience, till the Lord shows himself again." But she indignantly rejects such counsel. The matter is too urgent. She must seek him. Or, it is said, "Enjoy the beauties of nature, cheer yourself in pleasant society." "Ah," she replies, "I covet no rest, till I can enjoy it in the arms of Jesus." Her dejection increases, and she knows no other resource than to call upon him: "Tell me, thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon?"

IV.

Thus she inquires, thus she laments. At length she obtains an answer. The Bridegroom replies to her with another question; and he asks, "Dost thou not know, O thou fairest among women?" In what a delightful sense those words may be understood! A child in its distress flies to its mother for consolation; she listens to its complaints, and laughs away its tears. In this sense must we understand the reply of Christ. Shulamite stands mourning and distressed before him; she thinks herself black, and that she no longer belongs to the fold. The Lord laughs at her complaint, and seems to say, "Yes, thou hast really cause to be dejected about

thy soul !” ‘Shulamite, hast thou then forgotten? Dost thou really not know, O thou fairest among women? Thou who art arrayed with the glory of the Sun, who hast been made partaker of my nature, who art adorned with my righteousness, the righteousness of God; wilt thou hang down thy head as a bulrush? O thou fairest among women! be sensible of thy glory; for know I have invested thee with my own; and in truth no angel is so beautiful as thou art.’ This is the meaning of the words employed by Jesus. How often might they be repeated! How often do we meet with souls like Shulamite, whose very appearance says, “Do not look upon me, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, I am altogether too black.” They will perceive nothing of the Divine nature in themselves; they deem themselves at a great distance, and rather number all others among the children of God, than themselves. Yet, in all they say and do the seal of the Lamb that they bear upon them is visible: their sighs, their patience, their hunger and thirst, their love, all make it convincingly evident that they are the children of God, and are clothed with the righteousness of Christ, or that none are. And still, they persist in believing that all with them is a delusion; and though we address them in the words of Christ, “O thou fairest among women, dost thou really not know thyself?” What does it avail, that we speak? They usually do not believe us.

V.

But yet Shulamite is again to be comforted, and to obtain peace. To this end the Lord gives her, in the first instance, the good advice to go forth. To go forth! And from whence? To go forth from herself. Undoubtedly much of our spiritual dejection arises chiefly from our thoughts being too constantly turned within ourselves, busied in the contemplation of our own frailty and misery. We ought, indeed, to watch over our hearts, and daily and hourly to be mindful of our wretchedness, misery, and sin; but we ought likewise to look out of ourselves. Many are as completely absorbed in the thoughts of their own misery, as if there were nothing else to be considered; as if no cross had been erected, and no blood had flowed from it, to wash away sin. They view their depravity, as if unatoned for on Golgotha, as if there had been no son of God, to pay all our debts to the uttermost farthing; as if through Christ no paternal heart had been opened in heaven; and as if there were no such thing as free grace to justify the sinner, requiring nothing, but bestowing all. What can possibly arise from so partial a consideration of our state, but dejection and anguish? Go forth, thou afflicted soul, from the gloomy melancholy corner of thy poor heart. Go forth to the pleasure-garden of Gethsemane; visit Gabbatha, and the accursed

tree of Golgotha : view the wedding garment, the glory that is there prepared, and which Eternal Love presents to every longing sinner, let his inward state be ever so wretched. Such sights and contemplations, in spite of the dreary state of thy soul, will revive thy courage. Go forth also from thy great pretensions. Thy desires are too vast ; thou requirest greater things than have been promised to the children of God in this world. Thou wouldst taste and see ; but this is the time of faith ; away, away, with such pretensions. Dost thou desire the sweets and pleasures of heaven ? Rejoice, O sinner, if thou hast grace ; and let grace suffice thee. Thou wouldst wish the Lord to lead thee in the way which thou thyself prescribest. Go forth from these wishes ! Offer them as a sacrifice. Go forth from thy own will, and enter quietly and confidently into the will of God ! Let Him do with thee what he pleaseth ; or wilt thou be his counsellor ? Let Him provide for thee, and thou wilt do well. All this the Lord requires, when he commands “to go forth.”

Let us now inquire what further counsel the Lord gives her. “Go forth,” he says, “by the footsteps of the flock.” The tendency of this advice likewise is to restore peace to the dejected Shulamite. In the first place, it contains a serious reproof, similar to that which was given to Peter ; when not altogether satisfied with the career marked out for

him by the Lord, he pointed to John, to whom so rough a course was not assigned, and presumed to ask, "And what shall this man do?" To which the Lord replied, "What is that to thee? follow thou me." He says the same to Shulamite, in the words, "Go forth by the footsteps of the flock. Observe the sheep; they do not wander where they please, but they quietly and silently follow their shepherd. Do thou likewise, my beloved Shulamite. Consider what happens when one of the lambs goes a little astray from the fold, how the shepherd employs every means to restore it. Somewhat similar is the way that I deal with my sheep." This is what the Bridegroom will in the first place intimate to her. But at the same time he will point out the way in which she may again obtain consolation. "Yes," he will say, "I perceive clearly that thou no longer knowest thyself, O thou fairest among women. Thou art a child of God; but thou believest it not, and art a stranger to thyself. Thou art born again; but thou art no longer sensible of it. Thou art clothed with my righteousness, and hast every reason to be joyful; but thou canst not believe it. And why not? Because thou feelest thyself barren, and thy spiritual life is not in a flourishing state. But that is no ground for despair. Go forth by the footsteps of the flock." And Shulamite would certainly have done so. But what are we to understand, that she has done? She has ob-

served other children of God, has considered the ways of the saints ; and what has she there discovered ? That she is no solitary bird upon the housetop ; and that her experience has nothing peculiar, or unusual. Where did she find the footsteps of the saints ? Alas ! not always on verdant and luxuriant pastures, but most frequently on rugged paths and obscure cross-roads, in barren deserts and dreary wastes. The most favoured servants of God she has heard complain : “ Ah ! my tongue cleaveth to the roof of my mouth ; my strength is dried up like a potsherd ! ” The most holy she has seen prostrate in the dust, groaning and complaining.

And yet, miserable as they were, the Lord was with them ; they were still the people after God’s own heart, the apple of his eye, his peculiar care. But in due time they had again their hours of refreshment ; and showers of rain descended upon the parched and withered meadows ; and at length, after all the difficulties upon earth, their footsteps still shone above the clouds, among the stars of heaven ; they took their place in the midst of Paradise, and appeared among the holy angels, before the throne of glory. Such was the discovery made by the beloved Shulamite. Oh how encouraging and consoling was it to her, to find that all who had reached Canaan had traversed the same path on which she then was. She could then again believe

that the Lord was with her ; that he guided and sustained her, and that her path also would terminate in glory. Thus she thought she had her Bridegroom again ; she would again believe that He still holds her by His right hand, though in darkness ; and her going forth by the footsteps of the flock had been blessed and consoling to her.

O ye that are dejected and disconsolate, who, like Shulamite, are languishing in the heat of mid-day, follow her example. Turn your gaze and your reflections away from your own hearts, and from your own misery. Go forth to the ocean of mercy and love which flows on Golgotha ; the sight will produce an immediate change, and inspire you with other and more agreeable meditations. Then go forth by the footsteps of the flock, and learn that you tread the same path that the most distinguished saints have trod before you. This will support you ; it will revive your courage and renew your hope. Then feed your kids and your young lambs beside the shepherds' tents. The Bride is here compared to a shepherdess with a flock of hungry lambs. Her heart hungers, her spirit hungers, her understanding hungers, to comprehend the darkness that surrounds her ; her soul to be assured of the presence of the Lord ; her weak faith hungers after strength, her glimmering hope after food, and her expiring love to be revived. O all ye weary souls, go ye likewise forth, and feed your kids beside the shepherds'

tents. The shepherds are the men of God, who have spoken by the Holy Ghost, the ancient Fathers and Prophets, the Evangelists and Apostles ; and where they speak, instruct and console ; in their revelations, in their sermons, in their histories, and in their epistles ; there behold their tents, and the most luxuriant pastures. There learn that God is faithful ; that he ever views his people with complacency ; and that, even when they have left their first love, he recollects with delight the love of their espousals, and their first surrender of themselves to him. There learn that the entire foundation of your hope is not to be found within but without yourselves. That will strengthen your heart, and enable you to wait patiently till it please him again to pour down upon you his quickening grace. Rouse, then, thy afflicted senses ! Know thyself again, O Shulamite, thou fairest among women, adorned with purple and jewels. Wait but a little, and thy feet, after all thy doubts and fears, will also tread the golden streets of the heavenly Jerusalem, in the land of rest, and of an eternal sabbath. O sweet termination of all complaints and sorrows ! The Spirit and the Bride say, Come ! And let him who heareth say, Come ! And the Bridegroom saith, " I come quickly. Yes, even so come, Lord Jesus ! " Amen.

SERMON VI.

SOLOMON'S SONG II. 12.

And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.

CHRIST, the heavenly Bridegroom, invites his Bride to go forth to the hills, and to the mountains, to rejoice with him in the verdure and bloom of a lovely spring. It is not the spring of nature that she is invited to enjoy. It is the influence of grace, the spring of spiritual life, which the plastic breath of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, has caused to put forth and blossom in the soul of sinners. "Rise up, my love, my fair one, he saith, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the spring is come; and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land." Let us dwell for a short time on the last few words of our text, and,

I. Take a nearer view of the turtle.

II. Listen to its voice in the land.

I.

The Bridegroom speaks of a dove, whose voice is heard in the land on the verdure of spring. We

have already seen, that by the dove, in some places of our song, the Shulamite herself is intended ; but that is not the case in the passage before us. Some commentators have supposed that the Lord here describes the dawn of the period of the New Covenant ; and the turtle dove they imagine to be the voice of the preacher in the desert, the herald John. But under what similitude could this man, clothed in camel's hair, be less appropriately represented than under that of a dove ? We are of opinion, that by the dove the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, can alone be understood. As the Son of God condescended to choose the lamb for his symbol, the Spirit, in like manner, selected the dove. To whom does not the wonderful scene at Jordan at once occur ? And the Spirit of the Lord belongs essentially to that spring of grace ; for it is produced by this bird of heaven. That the Spirit in the text is denominated the turtle dove, is of little importance. The Lord compares the life of grace to the blossoming spring of nature, and to this simile the turtle dove was more appropriate than the domestic pigeon.

In order to discover the full meaning of this significant symbol, it will be necessary to take history as our guide. Three times the sacred volume presents to us this image ; and each time the circumstances, the epocha, and the design are similar. In the first place, Moses informs us, that

the Spirit of God moved (literally rendered, brooded) upon the void and formless earth. The Spirit, in as far as it assisted in the formation of the earth, and in preparing it as a theatre of peace and joy, is here likewise compared to a bird (beyond a doubt the dove) with her wings expanded, as if brooding on her eggs. Some hundred years later the dove appears to us again, and it is remarkable, under decidedly similar circumstances and at a similar epocha. Again, her wings are expanded over a waste and void ; again she moves over the face of the waters, but they are the thundering waters of the deluge—those devastating floods of wrath, in which, according to the Scriptures, the first world was destroyed. Over the vast watery grave of the former world she flies with the green olive-leaf in her mouth, the lovely harbinger of joy, hastening to convey to Noah the intelligence he so much longed to receive. And what does her appearance with the green leaf in her mouth announce ? It announces the termination of the Divine judgment, the coming of a new creation ; it proclaims the commencement of a time of grace ; of a reign of peace, which, under a new covenant, rich in promises, shall spring up for sinful man. For the third time the dove is seen on the banks of Jordan, resting on the head of our Saviour, when, in the great act of baptism, he solemnly and formally took upon himself our guilt, and silently

acknowledged it as his own ; and now tell me, my friends, if this third appearance is not of similar import with the first and second. Once again she moves over the waters, but they are those of John's baptism, in whose waves our Surety had just made, in the name of our souls, the great confession of sin ; and in our stead had solemnly declared himself worthy of death, and of the Divine wrath. Once again she appears above a waste and void, above the desolation of humanity, but whose ruin now rests on our substitute. Once again she appears at the commencement of a new creation of that which the Spirit, purchased by the blood of the Lamb, will produce upon the earth ; and again she is the harbinger of peace, joy, and mercy. We hail thy appearance, O sacred dove, upon yonder silent desert, and as a beautiful messenger of peace, over the baptismal waters of Jordan, that proclaim aloud our sinfulness, and our worthiness of condemnation and death. We might well have expected the eagle to flit across the heavens, with the cry of *Wo ! wo !* and announcing eternal destruction to the world and its inhabitants ; when behold, instead of the eagle, the dove appears above the waste and void—*grace ! grace !* is the burden of her song, and peace and joy her welcome salutation ! We bless and receive her with shouts of joy ! O ye, who mourn and quake, why are ye cast down ? The lion on the top of

Sinai, and of Ebal, has ceased to roar ; the olive-branch becomes green in our banners, and on the horizon of the new covenant days the dove is seen to hover.

Do we ask on what ground the Holy Ghost has chosen the dove for its symbol ? So many points of resemblance present themselves to our view, that, for the sake of brevity, we must restrict our reflections to those which are most striking and important. The dove, this tender, faithful bird, has been at all times, and amongst all people, an emblem of constant love ; and in this respect, the Comforter may, with great propriety, be compared to it. How astonishing is the love of the Eternal Father, who tore from his bosom his only Son, the child of his heart, to sacrifice him in the flaming fire of his wrath, and to expose him to the rage of hell, in order to snatch from the abyss of eternal torment a race obnoxious to death, and meriting destruction ! Deep and unfathomable is the love of our Redeemer, who left a throne of majesty, to ascend the accursed tree, there to pour out his precious blood for the servants of Belial and of sin ; to redeem, with this inestimable ransom, us wretches, against our will (for we desired Him not), from the power of Satan and of hell. No less great, wonderful, and unsearchable is the love of the Spirit, who has voluntarily undertaken to destroy the dragon's brood, to cleanse the dwell-

ings of impurity, and the dens of rapine and of murder ; and who, in the execution of his office, visits scenes of the most disgusting depravity and lewdness. What chambers of pollution are our hearts ! Like the cities of the plain, how full of corruption and uncleanness ; but if the Spirit once enters these Sodoms and Gomorrahs, he departs not again till they are thoroughly purified. How joyfully he causes the light of heaven to shine into these habitations of darkness, and stores them with the treasures of truth and wisdom contained in the Scriptures, and from that fulness which is in Christ Jesus. How unchanging and untiring is this love ! those who once become its objects can never be severed from its influence : “ I will send you another comforter, said the Saviour, that he may abide with you for ever.” But, alas, how often do his people stray from Him, and lose themselves again in the world ; yet he never forsakes them. How could he ? he pursues them into the vortex of dissipation, and leaves them no peace in their sins. He chastises, warns, invites them ; he causes lucid intervals to break in upon them in the midst of their revels ; and never ceases to call after them, Turn ye ! turn ye ! till they hear his voice, and return dejected and afflicted to the fold from whence they had wandered. Let none suppose that he will receive them with the bitterness of reproach, or overwhelm them with the thunders of

his wrath. Quite the contrary. He seeks, by every means, to wipe away the tears of his afflicted children, to inspire them with confidence in the faithfulness of Jehovah; and repeatedly says to them, Weep not, there are gifts also, even for the backsliding—nay, and perhaps bestows upon them unusual consolations; if therefore the dove be in truth the significant emblem of faithful love, it is the appropriate symbol of the Comforter. Of all birds, the dove is the cleanest and most delicate. In filthy places she will not abide. Thus it is with the Comforter. Many of you are ready to exclaim, But our hearts—are they not filthy? Indeed there is no deficiency of impurity there. But, let it be remembered, the dove is not at rest within them. Is she not incessantly engaged in detaching and expelling, in sweeping and garnishing? Her habitation must be cleansed, and she would never have entered it, but for the certain prospect of eventually rendering it completely pure and free from taint. If there be a spirit within you that can be at ease in the midst of impurity, and that can endure iniquity, be assured this spirit is not the dove. Where the dove resides, there is a constant conflict in the soul against the seed of the serpent—a holy and zealous desire to root up every thorn, and to consume it with fire. This dove, saith St. Paul, lusteth against the flesh, and the flesh against the dove, and there is a constant warfare. Where

the Spirit dwells, the heart becomes the arena of strife; for this Divine warrior rests not till he has bruised the head of the last serpent within us, and destroyed the last cockatrice egg. How sensitive is this heavenly dove! Of the dove it is said, that the feather of a falcon, or hawk, is sufficient to make her flutter and tremble. Thus it is with the Spirit in our hearts; if but the slightest impure thought arises within us, he is at once in emotion. Horror seizes him, and he casts the abomination from him with disgust and indignation. Are you sensible of the existence of such an uncompromising enemy to impurity within you,—then rejoice, for the dove is there.

The dove is gentle, and it is in this respect likewise a striking image of the Spirit of grace. In the form of a dove the Spirit descended upon Jesus. It was said of Him, "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth." When the village of Samaria had refused to receive the Lord, and the two sons of thunder angrily exclaimed: "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" Jesus turned and rebuked them, and said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." The Spirit of Christ is like a gentle dove. It judgeth not, thinketh no evil; when

reviled, it revileth not again, and is not so ready to call down fire from heaven. Where it enters, it introduces the dispositions of the dove. How could it be otherwise ? It makes us feel that we are miserable sinners, and convinces us that free grace alone can save us. This humbles, silences, and renders us indulgent and mild. Then we willingly cease from censuring others ; we behold not the mote in our brother's eye, on account of the beam in our own eye. It is unhappily true, that the children of God do not unfrequently give way to anger, jealousy, and a censorious spirit, and all traces of the dove are obscured. But on such occasions it is not the dove that stirs within us, but the Leviathan of the old man, that has again caused his voice to be heard ; it is not Jacob, but Esau with his rough skin, that is indeed mortally wounded within us, though he has not yet ceased to breathe. It is the flesh, and not the Spirit. The Spirit is grieved ; it upbraids and chastens us, and grants us no peace, till we are humbled and repentant. Thus it is evidently a dove—a spirit of peace and love, mild and gentle.

Already in the history of the creation, as we have seen, the Holy Spirit is presented to us under the similitude of a bird—no doubt the dove. The Spirit of God, it is said, brooded upon the face of the waters, as a bird broods with extended wings upon its eggs. This figurative expression indicates

that the Spirit also took part in the creation ; that it formed the waste and void, and gave shape and beauty to the earth. And spiritually, the Spirit is incessantly executing the same work in the human mind. While the heart is still as chaos, a world ruined by Satan, waste and void, and shrouded in the darkness and blindness of unbelief, the Spirit, impelled by love, descends and overshadows it, as it overshadowed the Virgin. Now the command goes forth, "Let there be light !" and there is light. We look down into the dark abyss of our desolate condition, and shudder with horror. The light is separated from the darkness. We perceive what we should be, and what we are not. We learn to judge spiritually, and to discern' good and evil according to the rule of God's law. And God calls the light day, and the darkness night. Thus, before we are aware, the light of a new life has sprung up within us, which scatters and expels the darkness of the old ; and the evening and the morning are the first day. Under the wings of the plastic breath of the Comforter, this spiritual creation advances steadily towards perfection. The desolate soil thirsteth for grace, and is refreshed with the verdure of a new creation. The sacred flowers of faith and love spring up. A new world is called into existence. The morning stars extol the power of grace, and the inward spiritual man, renewed in the image of Christ, walks with delight in the bliss-

ful paradise of communion with his God. "The Spirit moved on the face of the waters." Thus it is still in the spiritual world. Many waters rise upon the believing soul; but the Spirit breaks through them all, maintains the ascendancy, and sustains the life it has imparted. The sensuality of our sinful nature may be accounted as one of these waters. How frequently do its waves swell tumultuously; but the Spirit still moves above them. It resembles oil, which always floats upon the surface of water. Our sins of weakness may likewise be accounted a water. When we fall, the oil sinks; yet it is but for a moment. Behold the tears of Mary Magdalene, and of Peter after his fall! The oil rises to the surface; the Spirit again moves upon the face of the waters! The afflictions which befall us may likewise be numbered amongst the waters which rise upon the soul. When they break in upon us, we are alarmed; we tremble and are dismayed. A raging flood overwhelms the soul, and the Spirit is in the deep. But it is soon otherwise. Reflection comes, we bend the knee, and sigh, "Lord help!" We throw ourselves upon the tender mercy of the Eternal Father; hope revives, and we ask our soul, "Why art thou cast down?" We believe, submit, and are again comforted. The waters are forced back, the Spirit soars above them. Worldly thoughts, and the cares of time, may also be accounted waters. How frequently do they

overwhelm the soul like a mighty torrent, and keep it grovelling in this lower sphere! But the dove soon ascends out of these tempestuous billows; and with a tranquil mind, with an unconstrained and elevated spirit, we are enabled to rejoice in the midst of the tumult. Thus the dove is never prevented from moving on the face of the waters, and in every conflict is the last on the field.

When, however, the Scriptures speak of the Holy Spirit as a dove, the allusion is especially to the dove of Noah, that wished-for messenger bearing the symbol of peace and of joy; and it is his office of Comforter, of which we are more particularly reminded by this delightful figure, than of any other of his works and offices. When the Saviour testifies of the Spirit, "He shall take of mine, and show it unto you," does he not designate him as the dove which shall bear the olive branch to the ark of the New Testament Church? The Spirit is the appropriator, the sealer of that which the Son has wrought out for us. What was outwardly prepared, he applies inwardly; with the fruit of the cross he nourishes the heart; he causes the living waters of the fountain opened to spring up within us, and he conveys the blood of the Lamb, as a blood-sprinkling, into the innermost soul. Oh what a delightful, welcome vision, is this heavenly dove, when it appears unexpectedly with expanded wings above the swelling billows of spiritual sorrow and

conscious guilt, hastening with messages of mercy towards the trembling and afflicted soul! How blissful the calm after such a conflict, when the Spirit testifies with ours, that we are the children of God ; and the pledge of our eternal redemption is more precious to us than crowns and sceptres ! Now we sit under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit is sweet to our taste. Now all the promises of Scripture are ours. The Bible appears to us a richly laden tree, extending its branches towards us. On us the dying eye of Jesus rests, when from the cross he casts a last trembling look upon the earth ; on us he thinks, when he exclaims, "I lay down my life for my sheep ;" and to us his blood-stained arms appear extended, while stretched upon the tree. The consolation of reconciliation distils like honey, and diffuses itself through our inmost being ; the peace of God encompasses us ; the overcharged heart expands like the ocean ; the blessed dove has deposited the olive branch in the ark.

If we now reflect that the olive branch, whilst it is a symbol of victory and of triumph, is likewise a decoration of honour ; and that Noah, to whom the dove brought the olive branch, was a type of Christ ; we shall again perceive in this figure a trait of the Holy Spirit, by which its existence in the converted soul is verified. This heavenly dove also knows a worthy head for every crown and

garland ; and the ultimate design of all its operations is to glorify the Lord Jesus. It deprives the creature of all honour, to confer it on the Lord, and on him exclusively ; it indelibly impresses this sentiment on the believing heart : “ Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake ;” and it imparts to the mind that holy frame, which makes it recoil from the slightest wish to magnify itself, as from an infernal spirit of rebellion. The Saviour himself says the same of the Comforter : “ He shall testify of me.”

If then a spirit stir within you, whatever disguise it may assume, which tempts you to magnify yourselves, know that this spirit is not the dove. The dove will exalt the Saviour only.

II.

Having thus glanced at the heavenly dove herself ; let us now also listen to her voice ; for her notes are wonderful and enchanting. “ The voice of the turtle,” says the Bridegroom to his Shulamite, “ is heard in our land ;” and we say, God be praised. What discordant notes would have resounded through the world, if no spirit but that of man had ever prevailed in it ! There has never been a time, in which this heavenly dove has been perfectly silent upon earth. Here or there, in gentle strains at least, she has ever caused her voice

to be heard. That which, at the time of the flood, spoke by the mouth of Noah so warningly and so cheeringly to the hearts of sinners; that which, in the patriarchal world, proclaimed such glad tidings, and announced a day at which Abraham rejoiced; that which spake by Moses of a prophet, whom the Lord would raise up, like unto him; that which on the hill of Bethlehem inspired the sweet strains of the royal bard; that which, by the voice of the prophets, pronounced such wonderful sayings, and revealed such sacred mysteries; tell me what was it? What else, my brethren, but the dove; what else but the dove of that Spirit, which searches even the deep things of God, and which resounds through all the promises? In the Bible, that tree of life, she sits upon every branch, and her voice may be heard in an endless variety of tone and modulation; and those who have an ear for its melodies, know how affectingly and thrillingly she sometimes sings, how consoling and quickening her strains; so that the heart is penetrated, and almost dissolves in blissful emotion.

The turtle dove is heard in our land; not in the Scriptures only, but also in the land of our hearts: and here likewise her strains are harmonious, though varied. True it is, that other birds also coo therein, but the notes of the dove are easily distinguished. Dost thou hear, for instance, a spirit commend to thee any thing but Christ and

his blood, as the rock of thy salvation and the ground of thy hope ; does it speak to thee of thy good qualities, of the powers that slumber within thee ; close thy door against it. It is not the dove, but the raven. Does it cry, "Peace, peace ! there is no danger !" close thine ear : there is an infernal spirit near thee. Does it say, "Hasten from Sodom, and save thy soul !" give ear to it, it is the dove. Does it tell thee, "Thy sins are too great for thee, there is no mercy !" then arm thyself ; it is the lion's roar. Does it cry, "And if they be red like crimson, the blood of the Lamb will make them white as wool !" it is the dove. Does it say, "First become worthy, reform thyself, then come to Jesus !" give it to the winds ; it is an erring spirit. Does it say, "Come as thou art, come boldly, for the Saviour receives sinners," listen to its voice ; let it not be said to thee twice ; for the turtle dove is heard in the land.

The voice of the sacred dove speaks to our hearts, and reverberates from thence in confessions, in exhortations, in prayer and praise ; and thus again its voice is heard in the land. But is it always the voice of the dove that is thus heard ? It is true, the raven voice of the old man sometimes imitates so successfully the voice of the dove, that it requires a fine and practised ear, to detect the raven's voice in such melodious sounds. Even mental conflicts and states of feeling occur, in which

the Holy Spirit has not the slightest share, and which must be entirely ascribed to nature, and not to grace ; and yet they so strongly resemble the operations of the Spirit, that the clearest sight is often deceived and the nicest discernment frequently baffled. Here the well-known event in the history of Jephtha, the hero of Gilead, occurs to me, who, after he had defeated and scattered the Ephraimites, took possession of the passages of Jordan, resolved that none of the fugitives should return alive to their native land. Aware, perhaps, of their conqueror's intention, but obliged to cross the river, or perish in the desert, they approach the ford, and deny that they are Ephraimites. They are put to the test, all of them are required to pronounce the word Shibolet ! but they said Siboleth : "for they could not frame to pronounce it right;" and all were put to the sword. What a serious and important truth does this scene present to us. Before him who holds the ford, beyond which lies the Canaan of God, all depends upon an apparent trifle. On the existence or non-existence of a something within us, irrespective of all other considerations, will it depend, whether we shall be permitted to pass over, or whether the sword of his indignation shall descend upon us. The spiritual resemblance between the man who is rejected, and the one who is accepted, may be as great as that between Shibolet and Siboleth. Who can detect any material

difference? But God is a keen discerner. To him the difference in the characters of the two men may be as decisive, as was to Jephtha that between Shibolet and Siboleth, which marked the friendly Gileadite from the rebellious Ephraimite. Behold here two men. Both smite upon their breast, both weep, both call themselves the chief of sinners, and both are sinners. We see their tears, we hear their confessions. Both are afflicted, both complain. To us no difference is visible; we deem them both repentant sinners; and had we the crown of righteousness to bestow, we should invest them with the same decorations. Both appear at the passage of Jordan, both stand before the Judge; and behold! one only is crowned, and the other is lost. Gracious God! Why should this be? The one said Shibolet, the other Siboleth. We observed it not; but the Lord is a nice discerner. Only *Si* instead of *Shi*, but the difference is sufficient to cause an eternal separation. The one smote upon his breast from fear, the other from love. Hell made the one to weep, the cross the other. The complaint of the one was: Oh that I should have incurred such guilt! the complaint of the other was: Ah, that I should have caused thee, Lord Jesus, so much suffering! The one lamented the consequences of sin; the other, the transgressions themselves. Sin had not extorted a tear from the one, had it not rendered him miserable, for he

thought but of his comfort ; the other would have abhorred sin, though it had exercised no influence over his peace ; for he sought the honour of his God. In short, when the characters of the two were developed, it was apparent that selfishness produced repentance in the one, and that the tears of the other were those of love. In the one was concealed a repentant Cain ; in the other a weeping Magdalene. In the one nature predominated ; in the other, grace. A difference less perceptible than that in Shibolet and Siboleth, yet immeasurably great, and lasting as eternity ! Two men sit by the way side. Both cry, “ Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me ! ” Neither of them are hypocrites, but both mean what they say. We pronounce both blessed ; but will the Judge confirm our sentence ? At the passage of Jordan it will be decided. Though their acts have been the same, a mighty wind may there separate them for ever ; raising the one on high, while it precipitates the other into the abyss. And why should it be so ? To us it seemed, that both had said Shibolet. Alas ! the one had only said Si ; we did not observe it. That was his ruin. The one cried to the Saviour like Bartimeus and the thief on the cross ; the other like the devils ; “ Lord, do not command us to go down into the deep.” The one thought within himself : “ Ah, if I had but Jesus, what need I care for heaven ! ” The other, “ Ah, if I had but

heaven, what need I care for Jesus!"* The one sighed for the love of Christ; the other for his saving hand. The cry of the one marked the fervour of the lover; that of the other, the despair of the helpless, anxious for salvation, but indifferent by whom it is effected: the devil would be as welcome as Jesus, provided he could as effectually save from perdition. To our dull senses this was not perceptible. But he who sits upon the throne heard at once that it was not the Siboleth of the Gileadite. His ear listens for the voice of the dove. Nothing but spirit and truth can stand before him.

We cannot say, therefore, that true heartfelt Christianity consists in tears, in penitence, or in an earnest longing after the bliss of heaven. We cannot say it consists in prayers, in Christian deportment, or in evangelical knowledge. Neither does it consist in love for the Gospel, in the emotions it awakens within us, or in zeal for the spread of Divine truth. Nor in an open confession of Christ, and the ability to testify and speak of him with eloquence, edification, and instruction. Brethren, all this may only constitute a Siboleth; and wo be to us, if at the passage of Jordan it should so appear. It may all proceed from the natural man, and be the mere workings of a selfish nature.

* This is according to Luther's translation of Ps. lxxiii. 25.--ED.

But nothing will stand the Divine scrutiny, that is not the work and produce of the Spirit, and the essence of which is not the love of Christ.

That it is sometimes impossible for the nicest discernment to distinguish between seemingly devout sentiments, whether they are the effusions of the Spirit, or the mere promptings of the natural man, we have already seen. But there are cases, in which a difference may be perceived, like that between Shibolet and Siboleth, by which we recognise at once a Gileadite or an Ephraimite, In sermons, hymns, books and prayers, though equally correct and true, devout and evangelical, there is a certain something which we feel but cannot describe, by which we are enabled to say, "Here is the dove, and here some other bird; this is the Spirit, and this nature; this is genuine, and this spurious; this is life, but this a portrait."

The dove speaks through the children of God; but not always in the same accents. Sometimes its strains are sorrowful, interrupted by sighs and tears: "Lord Jesus, have mercy on me!" At others languishing, and expressive of the most ardent longings: "Ah, when shall I depart hence, that I may behold thy glory?" Now they are those of dejection and complaint: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Then they breathe the raptures of nuptial joy: "My beloved is mine, and I am his:

he feedeth among the lilies!" They are sometimes eloquent and persuasive: "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul!" Then again they are short and ejaculatory; a single "Ah!" or "Oh!" is all that we can hear—but they are tones that reverberate through the choirs of heaven. Sometimes it ascends in sighs and groans: "Put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help." Again its voice is heard through deep conflict and distress; in gentle accents it is true, but distinct, and full of consolation. The powers of darkness may sometimes succeed in bewildering a redeemed soul, by confounding all its evidences; by subverting its faith in the Rock of its hope, and in the sacred volume; till, in its perplexity, it is tempted to renounce all belief in a God or Saviour, in a heaven or hell. What can here be perceived of the note of the dove? Nothing, we are ready to reply. Here the raven's croak is heard. But let us listen attentively. It is true that in doubters, as such, the voice of the dove is not heard. But it may be recognised in the accents of complaint in which the tempted and benighted soul gives utterance to its doubts; in the sighs and groans with which it laments its unbelief; in the longing, wrestling supplications which the heart pours forth to the Lord, that He would again cause his light to shine. Thus, amongst the saints of God,

it causes its voice to be heard in an endless variety of ways, and diversity of modulation : but it is everywhere the same dove.

The turtle dove is heard in the land ! God be praised, a period has already dawned, in which these words have a delightful application to the land in which we dwell. The drooping and expiring church of Christ begins to revive, and put forth blossoms ; the frosty night of winter has begun to yield to the genial breath of spring, promising a more glorious future ; and the turtle, so long banished and forgotten, has reappeared in the land. How many congregations, that once heard nothing but the raven-like croakings of the most comfortless unbelief, are now refreshed by the voice of the dove ! What testimonies to the truth, what prayers and praises, have of late again been heard in the church ; and the presence of the dove has been most manifest and refreshing. But the brightness that shines in our day, is but the opening splendour of an incomparably more glorious period that is rapidly approaching. Magnificent promises hang suspended over the church, like clouds pregnant with blessings. Blessed assurances, like sweet messengers of joy, stand at her portals. O Shulamite, wait and be comforted ! Let not the tempests and the horrors which here and there may rage, excite thy fears. It is but the struggle between spring and winter, between life and death.

Death will be vanquished ; and when thou least expectest, it will again be said to thee, but in a fuller and more exalted sense, " Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away : for, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth ; the time of the singing of birds is come ; and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land !" O blessed period ! may the Lord hasten it. Amen.

THE END





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taken from the Building**

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